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Editors’ Note

This special edition of Security Challenges on the ‘Pacific Inner Arc’ is guest edited by Dr Joanne Wallis from The Australian National University’s Strategic and Defence Studies Centre. Dr Wallis has assembled a range of Australian and Pacific experts to discuss this critical region for Australia’s security. This special edition aims to highlight the need for Australia to rethink its approach to the region, in light of improvements in regional security and development. We are very grateful for the hard work and effort of Dr Wallis to bring together such an eminent group of experts.

Andrew Carr    Peter Dean    Stephan Frühling
Managing Editors
December 2012
The Pacific: from “Arc of Instability” to “Arc of Responsibility” and then to “Arc of Opportunity”?

Joanne Wallis

This special volume of *Security Challenges* contains contributions from leading experts and Pacific scholars that reflect on progress and prospects in the “Pacific arc”. This Introduction begins by identifying common themes that emerge from the contributions regarding the way in which Australia relates to the arc, and how the arc responds to Australia. It then summarises the contributors’ conclusions regarding the future prospects of the arc. It concludes by arguing that, although Australia has extensive interests in the arc, it has declining influence over the region. The contributions suggest that, in order for the arc to become a source of security, rather than threat, Australia needs to take a more cooperative and long-term developmental approach that engages with the local context, including the resilience of Pacific societies. Consequently, it may be time for Australian policymakers to see the region not as an “arc of instability”, but instead as an “arc of opportunity”.

During World War II the Japanese Pacific advance was “Australia’s moment of truth in the twentieth century”¹ concerning its vulnerability to security threats from or through the arc of island territories to its north and east.² Therefore, the “Pacific arc” came to be understood not only as a geographical description of the islands of the South Pacific, but also as a strategic concept for Australian defence planning. Following decolonisation in the 1970s, Australia’s concern shifted to the risk that the newly-independent arc states could fall under the influence of external great powers, a risk that was heightened by American and Soviet Cold War competition for influence in the region. This concern echoed the earlier strategic considerations of the colonial era, which influenced much of the colonisation of the region in the late 19th century. Australia subsequently focused on issues of stability in the arc states after the 1987 coups in Fiji, which dispelled any myths that the region was populated by strong, independent states. Australia’s attention was further captured by the crisis that began in Bougainville in 1989, by growing political instability in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and by the violence that surrounded the independence referendum in Timor-Leste in 1999.

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Consequently, Australia recognised that threats in the arc were most likely to come from weak states, rather than from powerful ones. This recognition reflected a wider international shift in strategic thinking that had been gaining ground since the end of the Cold War, most dramatically represented in Robert Kaplan’s 1994 essay “The Coming Anarchy”. In the Australian context this phenomenon was described by Paul Dibb in 1999 as “the arc of instability to the north and east of Australia”. The term “arc of instability” subsequently dominated policy debates about Australia’s near neighbourhood. However, as Graeme Dobell notes in his contribution to this volume, Pacific leaders “resented the idea [of the arc of instability] intensely” because of its negative characterisation of their performance and Australia-centric view of the region. The term was also contested by academics, with David Hegarty (among others) claiming that it “both oversimplifies and overdramatises a region of vast diversity and complexity”. Despite this tendency to gloss over significant regional variation, Robert Ayson has argued that the term has been “a useful way of focusing attention on particular elements of Australia’s strategic environment”.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks added impetus to Australia’s concerns about instability in the arc, which fell within a wider international discourse concerning the perceived threat posed by failing states. In the Australian context influential reports claimed that unstable regional states could become staging points for transnational criminals and terrorists. These concerns were used as the partial justification for Australia’s “new interventionism” in the region, including the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003, the Enhanced Cooperation Program (ECP) in Papua New Guinea in 2004, and stabilisation missions to the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste after riots in 2006. In light of these

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8 Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Transnational Terrorism: The Threat to Australia (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004); Elsina Wainwright, Our Failing Neighbour: Australia and the Future of the Solomon Islands (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2003).
9 Sinclair Dinnen, Lending a Fist? Australia’s New Interventionism in the Southwest Pacific (Canberra: Australian National University, 2004).
activities, the 2009 Defence White Paper reiterates that, after the defence of Australia against armed attack, Australia’s next strategic priority is the “security, stability and cohesion of our immediate neighbourhood”. In 2012 the Australian stabilisation mission in Timor-Leste will withdraw, and in 2013 the small military component of RAMSI will return home, while its other components scale-back (although an Australian policing and governance presence will remain in the medium-term). In 2012 Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste held relatively peaceful elections, and both appear to have formed fairly stable governments. The performance of the Solomon Islands Government has improved, and the Vanuatu Government functions quite well. In 2012 the military regime that has been in place in Fiji since their 2006 coup confirmed that national elections will be held in 2014, and created a Constitution Commission to make a new constitution. Therefore, it is timely to reflect on progress and prospects in the arc.

This introduction begins by identifying common themes that emerge from the contributions regarding the way in which Australia relates to the arc, and how the arc responds to Australia. It notes that Australian policy has been heavily influenced by the arc of instability discourse, which has caused it to see the region through a security lens. The contributions suggest that Australia’s focus on perceived security threats has encouraged it to overlook the long-standing and deep-seated challenges that face the region, as well as the considerable variation between different states, which has limited the success of its activities. This introduction then summarises the contributors’ conclusions regarding the future prospects of the arc. It concludes by arguing that, although Australia has extensive interests in the arc, it has declining influence over the region. The contributions suggest that, in order for the arc to become a source of security, rather than threat, Australia needs to take a more cooperative and long-term developmental approach that engages with the local context, including the resilience of Pacific societies. Consequently, it may be time for Australian policymakers to see the region not as an “arc of instability”, but instead as an “arc of opportunity”.

Reflecting on the Pacific Arc

This special volume of Security Challenges begins with a contribution from Paul Dibb in which he traces the evolution of Australian strategic thinking about the region, including the emergence of the term “arc of instability”. Graeme Dobell then follows with his proposal for a new term, “arc of responsibility”, which reflects “the responsibility that must go with a set of [Australia’s] abiding interests” in the region. Four experts then provide updates on the current situation, and reflect on Australian policy and involvement, in the most significant arc states: Ron May writes on Papua

Joanne Wallis

New Guinea; Sinclair Dinnen on the Solomon Islands; Gordon Peake on Timor-Leste; and Brij Lal on Fiji. These are followed by essays from two leading Pacific scholars: Jack Maebuta considers the role that peace education can play in peacebuilding in the Solomon Islands; and Jone Baledro Kadroka argues that involvement in international peacekeeping operations has empowered the Fijian military as a political actor.

When the term arc of instability was initially coined by Dibb it was taken to mean the region “stretch[ing] from the Indonesian archipelago, East Timor and Papua New Guinea in the north, to the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, New Caledonia and New Zealand in the east”, a definition Dibb utilises in his current contribution. While this broad interpretation was initially adopted by Australian policymakers and scholars, after Indonesia’s relatively successful transition to democracy most commentators narrowed their view. For instance, Dobell focuses on states to which he claims that Australia has a sense of special responsibility: Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Bougainville, Nauru, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. In this approach, he specifically excludes Fiji, from which Australia has distanced itself since the 2006 coup (although it now appears to be moving back to re-engagement). Reflecting their more specialised regional concerns, the remaining contributors focus on the geographic and cultural area of Melanesia. Melanesia is usually taken to include: West Papua, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, New Caledonia and sometimes, Timor-Leste. In accordance with the majority view, this Introduction treats the “arc” as the Melanesian region.

Australia’s Relations with the Arc

This special volume identifies several common themes regarding how Australia relates to the arc, and how the arc responds to Australia. Dobell focuses on Australia’s responsibility to the region. In the last two decades Australia has increasingly accepted this responsibility, evidenced by its intervention and stabilisation missions, and by the fact that, with budgeted aid of A$1.16 billion in 2011, it provides more than 50 per cent of donor funds. However, as he observes, “acting as the regional superpower and aid banker is not a role that ever attracts much thanks”. Moreover, as May warns, Australian aid “does not buy Australia more than a very limited, and changeable, influence over Papua New Guinea’s security policies”.

Consequently, there is a consensus amongst the contributors that, as Dobell eloquently observes, “Australia’s sphere of interest is not always its sphere of influence”. To illustrate the difficulty of achieving Pacific acceptance

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(which Dobell describes as “followship”) of Australian “leadership”, he refers to Australia’s failed attempts to isolate the Fijian military regime and stalled efforts to promote regional integration. In Papua New Guinea, May attributes this difficulty to “resentment... of Australia’s colonial past and its continuing role in Pacific affairs”. Peake similarly argues that Australia’s relationship with Timor-Leste is shadowed by its history (combined with ongoing tensions over the development of Timor Sea resources), which has resulted in “Timorese aggressiveness towards Australia”.

Writing about tensions in the Australia-Timor-Leste relationship Peake makes the important observation that Australia’s aid contribution “is dwarfed in relative terms by the size of the budgets at the disposal of the government in Dili”. Peake argues that “money in the bank brings self-confidence and reluctance to be advised by others”, which has seen the Timorese government “cool on substantive political engagement with Australian aid programs”. Peake foresees that a similar challenge may arise in Papua New Guinea, once revenues from its massive liquefied natural gas project begin to flow.

The nature of Australia’s aid is also important, with Peake noting that, while Australian aid to Timor-Leste is “technical-focused and non-concrete”, it competes with donors like China, whose contributions are more attractive as they are “free-and-easy”. When this is combined with negative perceptions of Australia’s “boomerang aid”, May argues that it partly explains why Papua New Guinea has similarly sought Chinese assistance.

As noted, since 9/11 security has been the primary lens through which Australia views the region. Accordingly, Dinnen argues that RAMSI was “underpinned by a powerful security imperative”. It signalled a “move from a traditional reliance on the soft power of aid and diplomacy to a more ‘hands-on’ approach” that privileged an external security agenda over the locally-specific and longer-term development challenges facing Melanesian states.

May and Dinnen conclude that relations between Australia and its neighbours improved after then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s 2008 Port Moresby Declaration, which ushered in an era of cooperation. Australia also entered into bilateral Partnership for Development agreements with Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, which committed Australia to this approach. Dinnen argues that these promising developments “reflected a growing sensibility [in Australia] to local concerns and priorities”, as compared to its previous security-driven emphasis.

Despite these positive moves, the consensus amongst the contributors is that Australia’s relationship with the arc remains sensitive. The contributors make a number of overlapping proposals for how Australia could cultivate regional followship. May argues that “Australia must improve its understanding of Papua New Guinea, through closer government-to-
government and people-to-people relations”. Reflecting a similar emphasis, Dobell highlights the importance of the seasonal agricultural worker schemes as an example of Australia “opening up to Pacific people”. Peake concurs that the way forward for the Timor-Leste-Australia relationship is to cultivate people-to-people links, with positive developments including goodwill visits and potential tourism flows.

The warming relationship between Australia and its neighbours, combined with the drawing down of Australian interventions in the region, may also see the return of what Dinnen describes as a “particularist and developmental lens” when Australia views the region’s future needs and prospects. This approach may prove less controversial, and result in more locally-sensitive policies, than the security-driven approach.

**Future Prospects of the Arc**

The contributors also consider the future prospects of the arc, and identify a number of security challenges. The general consensus is that external security threats are outweighed by internal security risks, which reflects the fact that security challenges arising from the arc come from weak states, not powerful ones. The focus on internal security risks highlights that human security issues such as personal safety, gender equity and access to education, health care and economic opportunities remain the most significant concerns in most Melanesians’ daily lives. This suggests that future considerations of the arc should shift their focus from a strategic, state-centric approach, towards a human security, people-centred approach, that is more concerned with individual and societal security.

May highlights several law and order problems in Papua New Guinea, and concludes that attempts to address them have been undermined by a lack of capacity and resources. Consequently, Dibb warns that a serious breakdown in law and order in Papua New Guinea may oblige Australia to respond with a “prolonged stabilisation mission”, although whether such a mission would be politically or practically feasible is questionable. May is also concerned about Papua New Guinea’s political stability, but notes that it has “only had six prime ministers in thirty-seven years, elections have been held regularly on schedule, and all changes of government have followed constitutional procedures”. However, all governments have been coalitions, which have been unstable and subject to frequent votes of no confidence. He notes that the potential for political instability was illustrated by the events of late 2011 and early 2012, when two competing political factions simultaneously claimed to constitute the legitimate national government. Despite this, after the June 2012 national election a new grand coalition government was formed that included the previously contesting parties, and “Papua New Guinea has come back from the brink of what appeared to be a serious constitutional crisis”. Yet May acknowledges that the Papua New
Guinea state remains weak, as it is not clear whether the new coalition will remain stable.

May also identifies two serious challenges that the Papua New Guinea Government will face in the coming years. The first is how to use the revenues generated by its new liquefied natural gas project to advance development. The second is the upcoming referendum on Bougainville’s future political status, scheduled to take place between 2015 and 2020. The confines of space prevent May considering this issue in detail, but it is worth noting that it is not clear whether the referendum will be held, as it is conditional on weapons disposal and the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) achieving internationally-accepted standards of good governance. Funding and capacity limitations have stymied the development of the ABG, and there are sections of Bougainville that remain outside substantive ABG control, where weapons remain freely available. Therefore, the Papua New Guinea parliament may decide that the conditions for holding the referendum have not been met.13

Even if the referendum is held, it is not clear what the outcome will be, as while the majority of Bougainvilleans appear to favour independence, many recognise that the capacity and funding challenges faced by the ABG would be inherited by the independent state. Therefore, it is not unforeseeable that many Bougainvilleans may decide that continued integration in Papua New Guinea is the only viable option. Alternatively, the referendum could be delayed until the ABG has developed its capacity and revenue options. Whether such a delay would be accepted by hard-core independence activists is not clear. Or, the referendum could go ahead, and a state-building mission, probably undertaken along the lines of RAMSI on a regional, multilateral basis and led by Australia, may be required to prepare Bougainville for independence.

RAMSI offers valuable lessons for future Australian interventions in the arc. Dinnen notes that RAMSI restored security quickly, encouraged the surrender of weapons and apprehended militant leaders. However, both Dinnen and Maebuta conclude that many challenges remain, including questions over the sustainability of the gains made by RAMSI, and the extent to which long-standing underlying issues have been resolved. Like Dinnen, Maebuta identifies the most significant unresolved issues in the Solomon Islands as being the “inequitable distribution of development benefits, the harsh economic situation and recurring political crises [which] have weakened the sovereignty of the state”. According to Maebuta, underlying these issues are “deep-seated traditional issues of land and compensation”.

Dinnen and Maebuta emphasise the importance of engaging with the local level to achieve sustainable stability in the Solomon Islands. As in other Melanesian states, 85 per cent of the Solomon Islands population live in rural areas, where Dinnen describes their socio-political order as revolving around “complex interplays of kinship and exchange relations, friendship, church membership and myriad claims to customary land”. Both agree that RAMSI’s initial failure to develop a sound understanding of the complex local context undermined its effectiveness. For example, a lack of understanding of the underlying currents of local politics meant that RAMSI failed to anticipate the public disturbances that occurred following the April 2006 national elections. Consequently, Maebuta argues that RAMSI should consider “widening its scope of operation in order to be responsive to local realities”, as “foreign intervention without local input cannot solve complex traditional issues”. Accordingly, Maebuta calls for a “culturally-appropriate deep intervention”. Maebuta envisages that this deep intervention would “include healing the real development wounds of the past and not merely providing a band-aid through the maintenance of law and order”. Peace education is seen as a critical component of such an approach, as it can “address the underlying issues in ethnic conflict and deal with post-conflict development challenges”. To an extent these calls have been heeded by RAMSI, and in 2008 the legislation governing the intervention was amended to mandate the Solomon Islands Foreign Relations Committee to “find ways in which RAMSI can develop programmes according to the aspirations and plans of the Solomon Islands”. This move reflects the broader Australian shift towards partnership with the region.

Somewhat paradoxically, Dinnen and Maebuta acknowledge that RAMSI’s successes may also limit its long-term achievements. Dinnen argues that, while there are high levels of public support for RAMSI, there is also a “continuing lack of confidence in Solomon Islands own institutions and anxiety to a possible return to conflict” after the mission withdraws. Rather than building self-sufficiency among local actors and organisations, the mission may have “inadvertently induced unhealthy levels of dependency and rendered RAMSI indispensible for Solomon Islands’ continuing stability”. However, Dinnen acknowledges that “RAMSI has been sensitive to local concerns about the potentially destabilising effects of its drawdown and eventual departure”. To that end, RAMSI has exhibited “a growing appreciation of the structural challenges facing Solomon Islands”, particularly poor economic prospects and the unresolved nature of many of the factors that contributed to the instability that preceded the intervention.

Similar issues arise in Timor-Leste, where law and order has been improved and the government is relatively stable. However, both Dibb and Peake express caution over the potentially destabilising consequences of the underlying issues of poverty, illiteracy and a young, growing population, with Peake noting that, “beyond the tarmac roads of the capital, many problems are manifest”. Peake also observes that, while law and order have
improved, capacity is limited, and there are signs of emerging paramilitarism amongst the police and a lack of purpose for the army.

The army has found a (somewhat perverse) purpose in Fiji, which has been governed by a military regime since the 2006 coup. Lal outlines the military regime’s “record of broken promises”, including its failure to deal with corruption, improve government transparency or deal with growing poverty and underdevelopment. Lal acknowledges that the regime has decreed some promising measures aimed at reducing racial discrimination, but concludes that they have been outweighed by its restrictions on public discourse and damaging economic policies.

An explanation for the Fijian military’s willingness to intervene in politics is provided by Baledrokadroka, who gives a fascinating account of how the participation of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) in international peacekeeping operations might explain its propensity to intervene in Fijian politics. He argues that the RFMF’s participation in these operations has given it a “self-image as mediator of political tensions and executor of coups d’état”. The military’s role in public life has also been enhanced by the fact that its involvement in international peacekeeping has necessitated an increase in its size. After the 1987 coups the RFMF also took on an internal security role and was given responsibilities such as rural development. Baledrokadroka describes how the military has consequently “become a parallel state within a state”, which overspends its budgets and wields significant political influence.

Although Australia protested the 2006 coup, imposed targeted sanctions on the military regime and initiated Fiji’s suspension from the Pacific Islands Forum and the Commonwealth, Baledrokadroka describes how Australia has been complicit in the rise of the RFMF. According to Baledrokadroka, Australia’s Defence Cooperation Program with Fiji (suspended after the 2006 coup) had the unintended consequence of bolstering the military’s capacity to intervene in Fijian political life. Baledrokadroka also identifies a degree of hypocrisy in Australia’s actions, noting that although the 2006 coup was condemned and sanctions were imposed, the number of Fijians deployed on peacekeeping missions increased and neither Australia nor New Zealand “impeded the participation of Fijian troops in UN peacekeeping operations”.

A common theme running through the contributions is the uncertain consequences of China’s increasing presence in the arc. Dibb identifies the possibility that China may establish a military base in Timor-Leste as posing a potential risk to Australia, although he concludes that the arc “is unlikely to become an arena of serious military competition between China and the United States”. China’s influence has been most prominent in Fiji, which Lal notes has been enhanced by the “Look North Policy” adopted by the regime. The Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste governments have also expressed similar sentiments. Lal concludes that it is unclear whether Fiji has sought a
closer relationship with China due to the aid and soft loans it provides, or whether it was “hoping to get Washington to put pressure on Wellington and Canberra to soften their travel sanctions on Fiji”. This pressure may have worked, as the relationship between Australia (and New Zealand) and Fiji warmed in 2012, after the Fijian regime created a Constitution Commission to make a new constitution, and confirmed that it will hold elections in 2014. While Lal raises a number of concerns about the freedom and legitimacy of the constitution-making process, its starting “was enough for Australia and New Zealand to call for the restoration of full diplomatic relations with Fiji”.

Other Future Prospects of the Arc

Space constraints have necessitated that this special volume focused on what I, as guest editor, identified as the most significant—and pressing—aspects of the arc’s future security. For completeness, it is worth mentioning additional security challenges that warrant future attention.

Gender inequality is a serious concern across the arc. Most significantly, according to UN Women,14 two out of every three Pacific women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence from a male partner. Gender inequality is visible in the public sphere, as although there have been some recent—and unexpected—gains (such as the election of three women members of parliament in Papua New Guinea), across the Pacific region only five per cent of parliamentary seats are held by women, and women account for only one in three people in formal employment.15 At the 2012 Pacific Islands Forum meeting, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced the A$320 million ‘Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development’ initiative, intended to expand women’s leadership and economic and social opportunities.16 Leaders at the Forum meeting also endorsed the ‘Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration’, which aims to improve women’s political representation and gender analysis in regional development planning.17 Given the pervasive nature of the problem, and questions over the capacity of the region to usefully absorb Australia’s large initiative, this issue warrants continued attention.

Most arc states rely on the exploitation of natural resources to drive private sector development. While natural resource exploitation provides a valuable source of revenue, it raises a number of challenges. First, natural resources

16 Ibid.
are often exploited unsustainably. For example, over-logging and consequent environmental destruction is common. Over-fishing (frequently undertaken illegally) is also a problem, as many states struggle to adequately police their extensive sovereign waters. Second, land-based resources have resulted in disputes (most dramatically illustrated in the Bougainville conflict), as the region's customary, communal land tenure systems often sit uneasily with more individualised market-based leasing and income distribution regimes. Third, resource exploitation has resulted in internal displacement, as it is common for land to be leased for mining or logging without the occupants' consent and/or knowledge.

The environmental effects of the over-exploitation of natural resources have been exacerbated by the effects of climate change, particularly in the form of rising sea levels. Many islands are only a few metres above sea level and several have become uninhabitable, resulting in the displacement of their occupants. To date the number of people affected has been relatively small, but if the effects of climate change continue to worsen, these numbers will increase. It is not unforeseeable that, if these numbers stretch into the tens of thousands, the people affected will be unable to be resettled within their home states, which could result in a tide of climate refugees to surrounding developed states, particularly Australia and New Zealand.

From “Arc of Instability” to “Arc of Responsibility” and then to “Arc of Opportunity”? 

The popularity of the term arc of instability in Australian policy debates from the late 1990s reflected Australia’s tendency to view the arc through a security lens, accentuated by the post-9/11 “war on terror” and the perceived security implications of “state failure”. Consequently, Australia saw itself as responsible for securing the arc through a series of stabilisation missions, aid programs and governance, military and policing assistance aimed at strengthening arc states. As these efforts were focused on short-term perceived security threats, they often overlooked the long-standing and deep-seated challenges that lay beneath them. Consequently, despite Australia’s extensive interests in the arc, the contributions to this special volume suggest that Australia’s efforts have had limited success and that Australia has declining influence in the region. Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste are increasingly willing to seek relationships with other external powers, most notably China. The Timor-Leste case also suggests that, once arc states access their own substantial revenues, Australia’s ability to use its aid for influence diminishes. In addition, RAMSI’s ongoing presence reveals that despite the many achievements over the past decade, substantial international support will continue to be needed to sustain these gains and enable the Solomon Islands’ own institutions to effectively manage current and future development challenges.
Therefore, the contributors largely agree that Australia should change the tenor of its engagement with the region by adopting a developmental, rather than security, framework. Consequently, Australia should consider undertaking “culturally-appropriate deep intervention[s]”, as advocated by Maebuta, which engage with the local context in order to address the long-standing challenges of uneven development, weak—and often illegitimate—state institutions and uncertain land tenure practices, many of which are legacies of European colonisation. An important aspect of engaging with the local context will be recognising that, while arc states may have weak state institutions, the societies underpinning them are often highly resilient, as communities fill the gap created by limited state capacity in order to provide law and order and basic public goods.

Although Australian defence planners have focused on the Pacific arc as the region from or through which a military threat to Australia could most easily be posed, a more stable region, with stronger states, could equally provide Australia with a security screen. Therefore, it may be time for Australian policymakers to start to see the region not as an arc of instability, but instead as an “arc of opportunity”.

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The Importance of the Inner Arc to Australian Defence Policy and Planning

Paul Dibb

This article examines the strategic importance of the inner arc to the evolution of Australia’s defence policy and how it has been perceived both as threat and opportunity. It analyses the classified strategic guidance from the 1950s to the mid-1970s and the subsequent public statements in Defence White Papers until the most recent one in 2009. This article focuses on both the conceptual framework of high-level defence policy and its implementation, but not on the details of military operations or the Australian Defence Force’s activities in the region. The article concludes by discussing the future strategic significance of the ‘arc’ to Australian defence planning out to 2030.

Australia’s strategic neighbourhood has not always been of great importance for our defence planning. This may seem surprising, given the proximity of the inner arc, which stretches from the Indonesian archipelago, Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea in the north, to the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, New Caledonia and New Zealand in the east. The explanation lies in our periodic preoccupation since the Second World War with distant conflicts in Korea and Indochina and, more recently, Iraq and Afghanistan. Mounting expeditionary forces in a subordinate role to allies in distant theatres has often been a greater priority of Australian governments.

Inevitably, however, as such distant wars have come to a close there has been a shift to refocus on the unique nature of Australia’s strategic geography. In defence planning terms, this has resulted in two key priorities: first, the defence of Australia’s northern approaches and, second, the recognition that the inner arc is the direction from or through which any credible threat to Australia would have to be mounted.

Australia has only once been threatened militarily by the presence of an enemy within range of our northern land mass. That was in the Second World War when Japan occupied the area that is now Indonesia, East Timor and parts of Papua New Guinea. At that time, the fear in Australia of a Japanese invasion was real—even though it turned out to be beyond Japan’s military capabilities. However, it needs to be recognised that deep in the Australian psyche is the worry (some would say paranoia)—which

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1 The proximity of this island chain gives it greater importance in defence planning terms than more distant and small islands such as Tonga, Western and American Samoa, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Nauru and French Polynesia.

2 T.B. Millar, Australia in Peace and War (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978), pp. 150-1. Japan did, however, plan to take New Caledonia, Fiji and Samoa (ibid., p. 151).
politicians even today cannot ignore—that we live in a large, sparsely populated, resource rich continent that is vulnerable to attack.³

This article examines the strategic importance of the inner arc to the evolution of Australia’s defence policy and how it has been perceived both as threat and opportunity. It analyses the classified strategic guidance from the 1950s to the mid-1970s and the subsequent public statements in Defence White Papers until the most recent one in 2009. I have chosen this chronological approach because it gives the reader a clear understanding of how key policy issues have varied in importance in Australian defence planning over time. The article focuses on both the conceptual framework of high-level defence policy and its implementation, but not on the details of military operations or the Australian Defence Force’s activities in the region. The article concludes by discussing the future strategic significance of the ‘arc’ to Australian defence planning out to 2030.

The Conceptual Basis of Australian Defence Policy⁴

As the most powerful Secretary of the Department of Defence, Sir Arthur Tange, once said: “The map of one’s own country is the most fundamental of all defence documentation”.⁵ Geography is the key to a sound defence strategy and one of the most important factors driving military posture and force structure. This is not to argue that geographical location alone dictates the defence policy of the state. Nation states do not find themselves in a geographical strait-jacket. Rather, strategic geography presents opportunities for defence planners to develop an intellectually rigorous and logical defence strategy and reduce the range of practical policy choices.

Australia’s area of direct military interest covers about ten per cent of the earth’s surface. It extends from the Cocos Islands in the west to the islands of the Southwest Pacific and New Zealand in the east and from the Indonesian archipelago and Papua New Guinea in the north to Antarctica in the south. Other than defending our own territory, the most important strategic objective is to help foster the stability, integrity and cohesion of our immediate neighbourhood. As successive Defence White Papers have noted, Australia would be concerned about major internal challenges that threatened the stability of any neighbouring country. In addition, Australian interests would inevitably be engaged if countries in this region became vulnerable to the adverse influence of strategic competition by major powers.

⁴ This section draws on the author’s ‘Is Strategic Geography Relevant to Australia’s Current Defence Policy?’, Australian Journal of International Affairs, vol. 60, no. 2 (June 2006), pp. 247-64.
I have argued elsewhere that if geography is used as the independent variable it can greatly help guide force structure priorities. By describing geography as the independent variable I mean that it is of abiding strategic policy relevance, despite the vicissitudes of change in the external environment and domestic variables such as the budget. It cannot, of course, ignore these other variables but it must form the base for prudent defence planning. So, the maritime capabilities—mostly air and naval forces—that we maintain to defend Australia also have the ability to support the security of our immediate neighbourhood because they have the range and endurance to do so. The land forces we maintain as part of a joint force to defend Australia also have the capability to contribute substantially to the security of our immediate neighbourhood. The strategic geography of our neighbourhood—in which all of our immediate neighbours are island or archipelagic states—means that their defences against external aggression would, like Australia’s, rely heavily on the ability to control their air and sea approaches. Thus, the air and naval capabilities that Australia has developed for the defence of Australia would be able to make a valuable contribution to this regional task, if requested and if deemed appropriate by Australia.

The characteristics of the archipelago to our north demand that we have the flexibility to respond to a wide range of military operations. These could extend from assisting or protecting evacuations from regional trouble spots, response to natural disasters or civil crises, aid to the civil power, peacekeeping and peace enforcement, and—in extremis—being able to work with our neighbours to respond in the event of armed aggression against them. And our planning needs to acknowledge that we could be called upon to undertake more than one operation simultaneously in the inner arc. The potential for instability in our immediate neighbourhood demands that we have that sort of capability in our force in-being.

We need to differentiate between armed conflicts of choice and conflicts of necessity. The former are discretionary tasks involving important international responsibilities but with limited direct consequences for Australia. Examples are: peacekeeping missions in Somalia and Rwanda and our military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Conflicts of necessity are non-discretionary tasks tending to be Australian responsibilities with direct and potentially severe consequences for our national security. Examples are: defending our territory and maintaining stability in the immediate region—for example, our intervention in East Timor in 1999. This distinction is important because maintaining the capability to undertake vital non-discretionary tasks deserves a place near the head of the queue when it comes to making force structure decisions in defence planning and the defence budget.

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Ultimately, the consistent application of strategic geography should be an iron discipline for a country with Australia’s modest size defence force. The reason why Papua New Guinea will always be of infinitely greater strategic importance to us than Guinea-Bissau is the simple fact of the abiding strategic importance of Australia’s immediate neighbourhood.

**The Neighbourhood in Classified Defence Policy**

It was not until the mid-1960s that Australia’s neighbourhood returned to strategic prominence after the Second World War. In the 1950s and early 1960s it was the Middle East and Southeast Asian contingencies that most preoccupied Australian defence planners. An analysis of the *Strategic Basis of Australian Defence Policy* papers shows how the treatment of the defence of Australia and the importance of the neighbourhood have evolved.7

In the late 1940s, the risk of global war with the USSR and Australia’s role in the Middle East were the main concern until the Korean War in 1950. In the 1950s Australia’s commitment to the Allied defence effort in Southeast Asia and the importance of Malaya as the first line of Australia’s defence brought defence planning closer to Australia.8 In 1955, the Manila Treaty created the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO), which formally committed the United States to the region. Even so, there was an oblique reference in the 1956 *Strategic Basis* to the possibility that Australia might face conflict in New Guinea without allied support.9 By 1959, the *Strategic Basis* document was stating that Australia should be prepared to act independently, at least for a time, in a limited war against Indonesia, including over West New Guinea.10

As Stephan Frühling notes, in the first half of the 1960s Australia’s international outlook was dominated by increasing concerns about conflicts in Indochina and Indonesia. The latter presented us with the prospect of a direct military threat: President Sukarno had obtained Soviet military equipment which was more advanced than that of Australia. It included Badger bombers capable of bombing northern Australia, fighter aircraft, a heavy naval cruiser and submarines. In 1963, this resulted in Australia ordering four Oberon class submarines from the United Kingdom and twenty four F-111 fighter-bombers from the United States.11

By this time, Indonesia had the third largest Communist Party in the world and it was in confrontation with the newly created state of Malaysia.

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8 Ibid., p. 16.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p. 17.
Jakarta’s main political ally was the People’s Republic of China and Canberra was alarmed by the existence of a so-called ‘Beijing-Jakarta Axis’ of new revolutionary forces that might aim take over the region. By 1965, Australia had committed a battalion to military operations against Indonesia in Borneo. But by the end of the year, Sukarno had been overthrown by the anti-communist forces of the New Order under President Suharto and the threat of war with a Soviet-armed Indonesia had been averted.

As T.B. Millar observed, it would be hard to think of two neighbouring states anywhere more dissimilar than Australia and Indonesia. The latter’s aggressive stance in the early 1960s had caused Australia substantially to re-equip its defence force and to contemplate the need to act independently of its allies against Indonesia. This included the possibility of Australian forces being required to act without the assistance of the United States against any future Indonesian threats to Papua New Guinea.

Except for the continuing war in Vietnam, Australia’s defence planning started to focus in the late 1960s and early 1970s on the defence of Australia as a concept. Thus, the 1968 Strategic Basis judged that “because of Australia’s geographic isolation”, a direct invasion of mainland Australia would present enormous problems for an enemy. Instead, it should be prepared to deal independently with sporadic attacks and raids as well as potential Indonesian threats in the “late medium or long term” to Papua New Guinea. The 1971 Strategic Basis paper judged there was no single or clear contingency to base force development policy on, but “more emphasis than hitherto should be given to the continuing fundamental obligation of continental defence”. This was an important statement of policy principle—but it was rejected by Cabinet.

The 1973 Strategic Basis was the first to include a separate section on Australia’s neighbourhood, establishing an approach that would be used by subsequent guidance documents. It noted that Indonesia was now interested in a stable region and saw Australia as an ally rather than an enemy. Indonesia was perceived as being of the greatest significance to Australia because of its position:

> The Indonesian archipelago imposes a substantial sea and air barrier between Australia and mainland Southeast Asia; it is also the country from or through which a conventional military threat to the security of Australian territory could most easily be posed. Australia’s relations with Indonesia are

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12 Millar, Australia in Peace and War, p. 236.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 25, 433.
17 Ibid., p. 27.
18 Ibid., p. 28, 460.
of profound and permanent importance to Australia’s security and national interest.  

At the same time, however, the Strategic Basis stated that Indonesia’s proximity and size, the possibility of friction over Papua New Guinea, the political extremism of the Sukarno era and the uncertain prospects for political development in the long term gave rise to doubts about Indonesia. Even so, it judged that the likelihood of Indonesia threatening Australia, either directly or by action in Papua New Guinea, was remote.  

Regarding Papua New Guinea, Strategic Basis 1973 judged that Indonesia had a legitimate interest in the situation in Papua New Guinea and would seek substantial influence there. It said Indonesia might sometime wish to use military force to protect its interests in Papua New Guinea but any military operations would be limited in extent and duration and confined to the border region. Beyond the possibility of limited activity in the border area, the likelihood of Indonesia adopting a military solution to any problems it had with Papua New Guinea was remote and significant military intrusions by Indonesia into Papua New Guinea were judged as highly improbable.

The section on Papua New Guinea stated that country was of abiding strategic interest to Australia because of its “geography and propinquity” and because of its importance to our military and trade lines of communication to the north and to Southeast Asia. No threat of military attack against Papua New Guinea by an external power was foreseen over the next fifteen years, but situations could develop that would offer scope for external interference from countries such as China and the USSR if seeking to increase their influence. The main issue noted for concern was the presence of large numbers of Australians (at that time 46,000) which in an emergency it could be necessary to evacuate in large numbers. The Strategic Basis observed that there were strong arguments against Australian intervention in the internal security situation in Papua New Guinea. However, in words that still resonate today, the 1973 document judged that should the Australian Government decide intervention was necessary, the object of intervention with ground forces should be to keep operations limited, short term, as indirect as possible and as far as practicable to avoid the use of force against the Papua New Guinea population.

With regard to the Southwest Pacific generally, Strategic Basis 1973 observed that no state in the region could possibly threaten Australia, although some might seek to prejudice Australian interests.

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19 Ibid., p. 459.
20 Ibid., p. 460.
21 Ibid., p. 461.
22 Ibid., p. 462.
23 Ibid., p. 463.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p. 474.
military capability and its display should be such as to sustain regional confidence in Australia’s support, but no special provision needed to be made for possible military operations.\textsuperscript{26}

The section on New Zealand in the 1973 \textit{Strategic Basis} observed that Australia was of far greater strategic significance to New Zealand than New Zealand was to Australia. It noted that New Zealand’s defence capacities were small and although its forces had in the past provided a useful supplement to Australia’s they had relied heavily on Australian, or other allied, logistics support. Nevertheless, it stated that the contribution New Zealand could make to Australia’s efforts should not be discounted.\textsuperscript{27}

The remaining two \textit{Strategic Basis} documents for October 1975 and September 1976 that have been published continue the practice of having a significant section on the neighbourhood. Thus, the 1975 \textit{Strategic Basis} observed that a friendly Indonesia could be expected to deter or at least impede a conventional assault on Australia. Indeed, it stated, without access to facilities in the Indonesian island chain, not even a major maritime power could sensibly contemplate a sustained attack on Australia.\textsuperscript{28} Nevertheless, the 1975 document acknowledged that for Australia there “will always be problems in living alongside a large, alien and volatile state.”\textsuperscript{29}

In addition, although not assessed as probable, “limited and localised and isolated military forays” by Indonesia across the Papua New Guinea border could occur if Indonesia considered conditions there to be causing unrest in West Papua. In these circumstances, Australian security would not be directly endangered but Papua New Guinea might call on Australia for military assistance. More substantial Indonesian military penetration of Papua New Guinea appeared improbable.\textsuperscript{30} Serious instability in Papua New Guinea, however, remained a contingency that Australian policy would need to take into constant account.

The 1975 \textit{Strategic Basis} (which was produced in October 1975) made only one reference to Portuguese Timor, where it stated that Indonesian use of force “appears likely” but this would not endanger Australian security.\textsuperscript{31} However, it could arouse political objections in Australia and risk impairment of friendly relations with Indonesia.

With regard to New Zealand, the 1975 document expressed serious concern over New Zealand’s uncertainty about the reliability of US assurances under ANZUS and about Australian strategic policy, which New Zealand

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 475.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 477.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 512.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 513.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 512.
interpreted as turning towards the defence of Australia and excluding New Zealand. It observed that New Zealand’s dominant approach to security matters appeared to relate to a very low sense of potential threat “in its distant corner of the Pacific Ocean.”

The last document considered here, *Australian Strategic Analysis and Defence Policy Objectives 1976*, was written after the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in December 1975. This was arguably the most important threat to Australia’s strategic neighbourhood since Confrontation. It involved harsh use of military force by Indonesia. Interestingly then, the 1976 document stated that Australia’s defence interest would be served by East Timor’s incorporation in Indonesia because the alternative would be an essentially weak state, open to outside interference. It also advised that Australia’s defence interest would be best served by Australia ceasing to press further its advocacy of self-determination for East Timor, which would be a challenge to Indonesian sovereignty.

The 1976 document observed that Indonesia already had the capability for low-level politico-military harassment of Australia, including its maritime resources zone, offshore territories including Cocos and Christmas Islands and lines of communication. This could present Australia with difficult defence problems. Defence planning and preparation should ensure that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) could mount the necessary military measures quickly in response. However, without substantial external aid Indonesia would need at least ten years to bring its defence forces to such a state of technical readiness that would provide a capability to mount a substantial military threat against Australia. Such a development would represent a major change in the determination of Indonesia’s national priorities, and would be immediately perceptible to Australian intelligence.

Papua New Guinea became an independent country in September 1975, and the 1976 paper noted that Indonesia had reservations about Australia’s will and capability to play a leading role in ensuring stability in Papua New Guinea. It assessed there was a possible, but unlikely, contingency of small-scale Indonesian military pressure against Papua New Guinea along their common border. However, direct military intervention on a large-scale was again judged unlikely. It noted that, from the defence point of view, fragmentation in Papua New Guinea would have major disadvantages for Australia’s strategic interests. In this context, it appeared desirable that a Papua New Guinea Government faced with threat or act of secession by its

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32 Ibid., p. 515.
33 Ibid., p. 586.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., p. 587.
Bougainville region had the choice of using military force to try to retain or regain control.\textsuperscript{37}

The 1976 document concluded that, within the limits established by New Zealand’s reluctance to allocate a larger share of its national resources to its defence and military, cooperation with Australia was generally satisfactory. However, it observed that New Zealand tended to make assumptions about an identity between Australian and New Zealand strategic interests that did not take account of Australia’s different geopolitical circumstances. Generally, New Zealand appeared to envisage a degree of cooperation with Australia that went beyond its defence capacity to support.\textsuperscript{38}

**The Neighbourhood in Defence White Papers**

We turn now to the publicly available and more recent Australian Defence White Papers, which are usually more guarded in what they say about foreign countries. However, there is much continuity with the basic defence planning precepts described earlier. No threat of major attack on Australia is foreseen, but a significant number of crises in the immediate neighbourhood have periodically raised this region’s importance for defence planners.

Thus, in the late 1980s the military coup in Fiji, the secessionist movement in Bougainville and political crises in both Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu involved contingency planning for evacuation of Australian citizens and options for military intervention. In 1987, Wellington’s decision to implement legislation banning visits by US nuclear warships caused Washington to cease treating New Zealand as an ally. Australia’s intervention in East Timor in 1999 (its largest overseas military operation since the Vietnam War) and again in 2006, and its peacekeeping operations in the Solomon Islands from 2003 ensured that the ‘arc of instability’ remained prominent in Canberra policy planning. Since the turn of the century, however, the ADF has been heavily preoccupied yet again with distant military expeditionary operations in Afghanistan (since 2001) and Iraq (from 2003).

These disparate operations, both in the neighbourhood and at great distance in the Middle East, have led to the policy formulation, most recently stated in the 2009 Defence White Paper, that Australia should be able to lead coalitions in its neighbourhood and make “tailored contributions” (i.e. limited numbers of troops) elsewhere.\textsuperscript{39}

We can trace some of these important defence policy considerations through successive Defence White Papers. The first Australian Defence White Paper, published in 1976 and called *Australian Defence*, set out clearly for

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 592.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 598.

\textsuperscript{39} Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), pp. 45, 48, 54.
the first time in the public domain the importance of what it called the area of Australia’s primary strategic concern. It said that, for practical purposes, the requirements and scope for Australian defence activity were limited essentially to the areas closer to home—areas in which the deployment of military capabilities by a power potentially unfriendly to Australia could permit that power to attack or harass Australia and its territories, maritime resources zone and near lines of communication. This area of primary strategic concern was described as our adjacent maritime areas including the Southwest Pacific countries and territories, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, and the Southeast Asian region. It noted that the Indonesian archipelago, together with Papua New Guinea, would be an important factor in any offensive military strategy against Australia.  

The 1987 Defence White Paper, *The Defence of Australia*, was primarily about defence self-reliance and designing a force structure for the defence of Australia. It included the neighbourhood in what it called the area of direct military interest and observed that it was in our own region where we had the most realistic prospect of substantial defence influence and involvement. It said developments in the archipelagic states, and especially Indonesia, were of great strategic significance to us and that Australia saw a stable Indonesia as an important factor in its own security. Indonesia formed a protective barrier to Australia’s northern approaches and it possessed the largest military capability among the ASEAN nations.

With regard to the Southwest Pacific, the 1987 Defence White Paper said that the countries in the region lay across important trade routes and approaches to Australia’s east coast, where most of our major population centres were located. An unfriendly maritime power in the area could inhibit freedom of movement through these approaches and could place in doubt the security of Australia’s military equipment supplies from the United States. It observed that Australia’s strategic focus on the region had widened as a number of the island states attained independence and as the region received increased attention from external powers. The establishment of fisheries agreements between some regional states, such as Vanuatu and Kiribati, and the USSR were of concern, and the establishment of a Soviet presence ashore would be an unwelcome development.

The White Paper said that the fragile and narrowly-based economies of the Southwest Pacific countries would continue to present opportunities for exploitation by external powers. It specifically noted that Australia would be

42 Ibid., p. 17.
43 Ibid.
The Importance of the Inner Arc to Australian Defence Policy and Planning

understandably concerned should a hostile power gain lodgement or control in Papua New Guinea. 44

The 1987 Defence White Paper was blunt about New Zealand. It stated that the dispute between New Zealand and the United States over visits by nuclear ships and aircraft had seriously damaged the defence relationship between these two allies. Australia was not a party to the dispute but it accepted that access for ships and aircraft was a normal part of an alliance relationship. Australia therefore regretted that New Zealand policy detracted from that relationship. 45

The 1994 Defence White Paper was more positive about New Zealand. It said both Australia and New Zealand expected that if either country were threatened, the other would come to its aid. Australia valued the support which New Zealand could offer Australia in a conflict and believed that, in the more demanding strategic environment of the next century, its defence alliance with New Zealand might become even more important. 46 New Zealand’s smaller economic base imposed constraints on the size of its defence effort, but Australia would seek a continued commitment to sustaining defence capabilities in the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) that “can contribute to our shared strategic interests.” 47

The main focus of the section on the Southwest Pacific was on Papua New Guinea, which is described as Australia’s most substantial defence relationship in the region. It noted that under the Joint Declaration of Principles signed in 1987, Australia and Papua New Guinea were committed to consult to decide what measures should be taken in response if an external armed attack threatened the security of either country. 48

The 1994 White Paper said that Australia’s defence relationship with Indonesia was our most important relationship in Southeast Asia. Australia’s security was enhanced as Indonesia developed its capacity to defend its own territory, because this made it less likely that in the future any hostile third power could mount attacks from or through the archipelago across our sea and air approaches. The White Paper noted that the stability, cohesion, economic growth and positive approach to the region which had characterised Indonesia since 1965 had contributed much to the stable and generally benign strategic environment which had prevailed in Southeast Asia since the end of the Vietnam War. This, in turn, “has done much to

44 Ibid., p. 19.
45 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
48 Ibid., p. 92.
ensure that the demands on Australian defence planning have remained manageable".49

The 2000 Defence White Paper, *Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force*, marked a change of government but, even so, it continued with the by-now conventional wisdom that preventing or defeating any armed attack on Australia “is the bedrock of our security and the most fundamental responsibility of government”.50 The pattern of previous Defence White Papers is followed by the assertion that our second strategic objective is to help foster the stability, integrity and cohesion of our immediate neighbourhood.51

On the sensitive issue of East Timor, the White Paper acknowledged that the deployment of Australian troops under the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) had caused understandable tensions with Indonesia, which resulted in the suspension of most areas of defence contact. Lingering misunderstandings in Indonesia about Australia’s recent role in East Timor had made it hard to build on the opportunities offered by Indonesia’s democratising achievements to establish the foundations of a new defence relationship.52 It also noted that East Timor faced formidable security challenges, thus foreshadowing our decade-long commitment of ADF deployments to that country.

On Papua New Guinea, the 2000 White Paper again refers to “the expectation that Australia would be prepared to commit forces to resist external aggression” against Papua New Guinea.53 It also noted that events over the last decade, including the Bougainville conflict and the Sandline affair, had placed enormous pressure on the unity and effectiveness of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) and had confirmed that it was in need of reform. It bluntly observed that recent events elsewhere in the Southwest Pacific “have underlined the importance of a PNGDF that is loyal and responsive to political control”.54 This is the only indirect reference in the White Paper to Fiji, other than a mention that instability there and in the Solomon Islands had “brought a downscaling of our (defence) activities in those countries”.55

Regarding New Zealand, the 2000 White Paper stated we have both strong similarities and “sometimes surprising differences” between us.56 It stated

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49 Ibid., p. 87.
51 Ibid., pp. 30-1.
52 Ibid., p. 42.
53 Ibid., p. 43.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., p. 44. No mention was made of Fiji in either the 1987 or 1994 Defence White Papers.
56 Ibid., p. 42.
that New Zealand’s strategic perceptions and outlook differed from Australia’s in significant ways: New Zealand’s view that strategic circumstances may not require the maintenance of capable air and naval forces differed from Australia’s view of its own needs. It went on to observe that we would regret any decision by New Zealand not to maintain at least some capable air and naval combat capabilities because such forces would allow a more significant contribution to be made to protecting our shared strategic interests, especially in view of the essentially maritime nature of our strategic environment.57

This criticism is balanced by acknowledging that New Zealand made an outstanding contribution of its forces to INTERFET and that Australia was grateful for the speed and generosity with which they were committed.

The last White Paper in this series, *Defending Australia in the Asia-Pacific Century: Force 2030*, was published in May 2009. Although it marks some radical changes from its predecessors by speculating about a major power adversary (arguably China) attacking Australia, it adheres to conventional wisdom when it comes to asserting Australia’s strategic priorities. As usual, they are listed as being, first, the defence of Australia against direct armed attack, and second, the security, stability and cohesion of our immediate neighbourhood. It observes that our military superiority in the immediate neighbourhood “would increase the threshold of military modernisation required by nearby states to be able to develop such a (comparable) capacity”.58

The 2009 White Paper stated that the continued stability of Indonesia is one of the most important features of our strategic outlook. It confirmed a strong commitment by the Australian Government to Indonesia’s territorial integrity. The unspoken agenda here is the continuing suspicions in Jakarta that, following East Timor, Australia aims to detach West Papua from the Republic. The White Paper went on to say that a weak and fragmented Indonesia would “potentially be a source of threat to our own security” and would almost certainly require a heightened defence posture on Australia’s part.59

The 2009 White Paper is quite pessimistic about the challenges facing the Southwest Pacific and East Timor which “will continue to be beset to some degree by economic stagnation and political and social instability” as well as “Weak governance, crime and social challenges that will continue to jeopardise economic development and community resilience”.60 It observes

57 Ibid.
58 Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Canberra; Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), p. 42.
59 Ibid., pp. 35, 42.
60 Ibid., pp. 35-6.
that, on occasion, these factors will cause security problems “of the kind to which Australia may need to respond directly”, including with ADF deployments.\textsuperscript{61} Fiji gets a particular mention as being “plagued by a military that illegally interferes in the democratic process”.\textsuperscript{62}

The section on New Zealand stressed the importance of successive deployments and combined operations with Australia in East Timor, the Solomon Islands and elsewhere that underscored the coincidence of Australian and New Zealand security interests and the critical need for close coordination of their defence postures and forces.\textsuperscript{63} The 2009 White Paper warned that this would require a concerted effort on the part of both countries and it specifically mentioned the proposal to develop an ANZAC task force capable of deploying at short notice into the immediate region.\textsuperscript{64}

**Prospects for the “Arc of Instability”**

This survey of over half a century of Australian defence policy towards its strategic neighbourhood can be summarised in three broad phases:

1. The most serious perceived threat was in the early 1960s when President Sukarno announced his policy of Confrontation towards the new state of Malaysia and his acquisition of advanced Soviet military equipment, which led to Australia purchasing submarines and long-range F-111 fighter-bombers. Australian defence expenditure doubled between 1960 and 1965. However, the coming to power of the Suharto Government in 1965 transformed the relationship into a friendlier one for the following decade until Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor in 1975. For the next period of more than fifteen years, extending into the early 1990s, planning for the defence of Australia and the Kangaroo series of military exercises in the north of Australia centred on possible Indonesian low-level threats.\textsuperscript{65}

2. From the late 1980s, the next decade shifted Australia’s focus to instability and crises in the Southwest Pacific at a time when New Zealand was also perceived in Canberra as something of a strategic liability.\textsuperscript{66} A succession of events in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p. 36.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p. 97.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., p. 98.
\textsuperscript{66} This is the period when the phrase “arc of instability” was used. See Paul Dibb, David D. Hale and Peter Prince, ‘Asia’s Insecurity’, Survival, vol. 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1999), p. 18. For an extended analysis of the concept see Robert Ayson, ‘The “Arc of Instability” in Australian Strategic Policy’, Australian Journal of International Affairs, vol. 61, no. 2 (June 2007), pp. 215-31.
Bougainville, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands saw military force used by some island states, the threat of insurrection and military mutiny, and secessionist tendencies. On a number of occasions, the Australian Government and the Chiefs of Staff Committee considered the pros and cons of military intervention. However, the most serious use of force was in 1999 when 5000 Australian troops led the UN intervention force into East Timor. The government in Canberra was advised by the then Chief of Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie, that if the operation went wrong it could lead to military confrontation and even war with Indonesia.

3. Since the turn of the century security in the region has in some important respects improved. There are no significant defence tensions with Indonesia and none seem to be in prospect. The security situation in East Timor has settled down since the events of 2006 and the presidential and general elections in 2012 occurred peacefully enough. The remaining ADF troops will probably be withdrawn sometime in 2013. Papua New Guinea, however, is a serious worry and the domestic security situation and political governance continue to be highly volatile and unpredictable with increased potential for large-scale disorder. Similarly, the situations in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji remain potentially unstable. But defence relations with New Zealand are now in much better shape since Wellington’s generous military support of Australia in East Timor. New Zealand’s relationship with the United States has also greatly improved and Wellington is substantially back into a closer security partnership with Washington.  

What the above analysis demonstrates is that the inner arc has never really been a homogeneous neighbourhood of either instability or peace. Both attributes have generally been there, and as they come and go, Australia’s defence focus changes accordingly.

It remains to consider what could go wrong in the neighbourhood over the next two or three decades and whether there will be basic continuity between the past and the future for Australia’s defence planners. The following should be key policy considerations for the next Defence White Paper in 2013.

PROSPECTS FOR INDONESIA
The intelligence assessment of central strategic importance for Australia is the future of Indonesia. A stable and democratic Indonesia with a strong  

68 For a discussion of the challenges facing Indonesia see Damien Kingsbury, ‘Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Indonesia’s Arduous Path of Reform’, Strategy (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, January 2012).
economy is the preferable outcome. A fragmenting Indonesia, or a country ruled by an authoritarian nationalist or extreme Islamic government, could pose serious defence planning challenges to Australia. Indonesia's economy is growing impressively and, other things being equal, this should underpin political stability. By 2040 its population is projected to be close to 300 million and it may have the fourth-largest economy in the world. If that occurs, Indonesia could become one of what Coral Bell called the emerging society of giants.69 However, that will not happen unless it tackles poor governance and corruption, workforce skills and education, and poor infrastructure.

We have got used to the idea that Indonesia's military forces have little in the way of strategic reach. Over the next two or three decades that may change if there are sustained high rates of economic growth and higher defence budgets. Depending upon the state of our relationship with Jakarta, Australia will have to assess carefully the implications of any seriously enhanced Indonesian military capabilities, especially naval and air. A well-armed, unfriendly Indonesia would be a first order strategic challenge for Australia and would preoccupy us to the exclusion of practically every other defence planning issue. On the other hand, a well-armed friendly Indonesia would be a security asset for Australia, and the region. This underlines how important it is for Australia to develop a much deeper strategic relationship with Indonesia and to support its continued democratic and economic development.

THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC

In the Southwest Pacific, Papua New Guinea will continue to be the country of most concern to Australia. By 2040, it will have more than 11 million people. When combined with unprecedented economic growth generated by Papua New Guinea's resources wealth, this will enhance the country's prominence and relative weight in the region. How should Australia respond to Papua New Guinea's growing influence? A great deal depends on whether Papua New Guinea can resolve its chronic internal political and security problems. For Canberra, the most important defence issue will be the avoidance of conflict between Papua New Guinea and Indonesia over the Indonesian province of Papua. Australian defence planners would not want to be drawn into such a scenario on the long and rugged Papua New Guinea-Papua border. The classified version of the author's Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities in 1986 concluded that in such a scenario it would be impossible for even the full resources of the Australian Army and its Reserve component to defend this border.70 Short of such an extreme scenario, a major breakdown of security in Papua New Guinea could see the

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70 Dibb and Brabin-Smith, 'Indonesia in Australian Defence Planning', pp. 84-5.
commitment of a major part of the Australian Army in a prolonged stabilisation mission, given the rugged nature of the geography.

TIMOR-LESTE
Timor-Leste will continue to be of concern because of its proximity to our northern approaches and its common border (like Papua New Guinea) with Indonesia. The consolidation of democracy in the 2012 presidential and general elections and Timor-Leste’s potential for resource-based economic growth are promising forces for stability. However, as a comprehensive report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) has noted, widespread poverty, high levels of illiteracy and a rapidly growing young population are serious challenges to forging a viable state. Australia has a keen interest in seeing the success of democracy and the rule of law in Timor-Leste and that its military forces remain focused on external defence activities and not domestic politics. Dili’s very important relations with Jakarta seem to be on a workable footing, not least because of the decision by the Timor-Leste leadership to leave the past behind them. It is not in Australia’s interests for there to be tension between Timor-Leste and Indonesia. Timor-Leste’s relations with China, however, are of potential concern: as the ASPI report observes, the increasing assertiveness and almost certain expansion of China’s ‘soft power’ approach towards Timor-Leste will challenge Canberra’s political influence. If a military base were to be established at some future date in Timor-Leste by a growing and assertive China, Australia would be deeply concerned. This seems an unlikely prospect.

NEW ZEALAND
New Zealand will continue to be Australia’s closest ally and most reliable defence partner in the neighbourhood. Although its defence force will increasingly lag technologically behind that of Australia, it is well suited for operations in the Southwest Pacific and in places such as Timor-Leste. It will not, however, be relevant to Australian high-tempo military operations to defend our northern approaches, should they ever occur in future. Even so, the ability of the NZDF to deploy a battalion group of capable infantry anywhere in the Southwest Pacific and be able to maintain a high degree of interoperability with the Australian Defence Force is a valuable strategic asset for Canberra. It will be important for the two defence forces to plan potential operational scenarios in the Southwest Pacific together. This might include joint operations using Australia’s soon to be delivered large amphibious ships, which are capable of carrying 1000 troops. There will be

71 ‘A Reliable Partner: Strengthening Australia–Timor Leste Relations’, Special Report (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, April 2011). The authors of this report are: Damien Kingsbury, Dionisio Babo-Soares, Vandra Harris, James J. Fox, Sam Bateman and Anthony Bergin.

72 Ibid., p. 4.
situations, however, where the ‘lighter footprint’ and less obtrusive nature of the NZDF may be preferable in certain Southwest Pacific situations.

THE LONG-RANGE STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

Lastly, there is the question of how the changing balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region, and particularly the growing competition between China and the United States, may affect the strategic situation in Australia’s inner arc. The Southwest Pacific is unlikely to become an arena of serious military competition between China and the United States.\(^73\) Their strategic priorities will be focused elsewhere on Northeast Asia, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. However, China’s use of soft power is already seeing it gain influence in some parts of the region and its defence relations with Fiji and Timor-Leste are becoming of some concern. There may be situations in which China understandably uses its military forces to evacuate its growing number of citizens in a regional crisis. But the most serious development would be if China developed a military base in Australia’s neighbourhood. As the 2009 Defence White Paper observed: what matters most from a strategic point of view is that no major military power that could challenge the control of the air and sea approaches to Australia has access to bases in our neighbourhood from which to project force against us.\(^74\) China has no military bases overseas. In the highly unlikely event that such a development was to occur in our neighbourhood, however, it would have serious implications for Australian defence planning.

Beijing is much more likely to be interested in trying to gain influence in Indonesia because of its key strategic position astride vital straits connecting the South China Sea with the Indian Ocean. Australia has a keen strategic interest in seeing a resilient Southeast Asia, with Indonesia as its natural leader, which can cooperate to prevent the intrusion of any potentially hostile external power. This is also an approach that should resonate with Indonesia’s own perception of its national resilience and its tradition of non-alignment.

The rebalancing of US forces to give greater emphasis to the Asia-Pacific region is partly in response to the build-up of China’s military capabilities, particularly its navy. From a defence policy perspective, a modest increase in the US naval, air and Marine presence in Australia provides reassurance

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\(^74\) Department of Defence, Defending Australia in the Asia-Pacific Century: Force 2030, p. 42.
and reinforces the protection of our vulnerable northern approaches. It also has the potential to support our strategic interests in the immediate neighbourhood. For instance, the presence of 2500 United States Marines in Darwin by 2015 will have the capability to mount humanitarian and disaster relief operations in the Southwest Pacific and Indonesia. Were higher level contingencies to occur, the greater use by the US Navy of Australia’s major naval base at HMAS Stirling in Western Australia would significantly reduce the time taken in a crisis for the United States to deploy into Australia’s key area of strategic interest, including our neighbourhood. Combined Australian and US (and New Zealand) forces may also be relevant to a wider range of moderately likely scenarios in the inner arc over the next twenty years or so. As America ‘pivots’ back to the Asia-Pacific, Australia post-Afghanistan should complement this shift by refocusing on its vital strategic interests in its own neighbourhood.

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From “Arc of Instability” to “Arc of Responsibility”

Graeme Dobell

This article argues that, rather than viewing Melanesia as an “arc of instability”, Australia should see it as an “arc of responsibility”. The idea of responsibility makes explicit the central role that Australia seeks in the region, and the idea of the arc reflects Australian perspectives. By its actions, Australia has extended its formal security guarantee to Papua New Guinea to the rest of Melanesia and Timor-Leste. The nature of the guarantee has expanded beyond protecting external security to a range of commitments to maintain the internal stability of these states. In an ad hoc manner, Australia has expanded its role as security guarantor to match its position as the region’s largest aid donor. Yet Australia still has far to go before its understanding of its economic role in the arc matches its security guarantees. And Australia’s leadership ambition does not always get much regional “followship”.

When the term “arc of instability” was being widely used in Australia in the last decade, the leaders of the South Pacific resented the idea intensely. The Islands might be part of a geographic arc—as perceived from Australia—but Island elites hated being lumped together as a single entity: a group of failing countries with a common volatile and insecure identity, limping along together in their collective instability. The “arc of instability” label offended Island polities almost as much as then Foreign Minister Alexander Downer’s memorable 2001 reference to “busted arse countries”. 1 Downer did not actually identify the nations he thought were busted, but the tough love approach the Howard-Downer Government often employed towards the South Pacific gave Island leaders a hint that they were included. “Instability” fell out of favour. Instead, Canberra tried to use “fragile” or “weak”, and some analyses even went so far as to list the membership of the fragile club (the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Fiji and Nauru). 2 Again, this did not go down too well with Island leaders.

In a 2007 essay, I tracked the use of the “arc of instability” by Australian leaders and the strategic community. 3 As a term, it has deep roots in Australia’s history and psyche, and it was useful—in Canberra—for trying to

2 Box 1: View on the fragility of PICs, Ron Duncan and James Gilling, Chapter 8: Pacific Island Countries, in AusAID, Companion Volume: Core Group Recommendations Report for a White Paper on Australia’s Aid Program (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2005), p. 8.8.
cram a range of diplomatic, economic and geopolitical forces into one phrase. The problem, however, was much more than the way the instability label made Island leaders irate.

The “arc of instability” was descriptive rather than explanatory or analytical; it did not have much utility when you were standing in one of the individual states. In that previous work, I used “Melanesian arc” as much as “arc of instability”. This was less offensive but still omitted one key player from the picture. The “Melanesian arc” or the “arc of instability” only make a sort of collective sense if the regional superpower has a central place in the arc. Thus, in recent years, I have shifted from using the “Melanesian arc” to talk of “Australia’s arc” or “Australia’s arc of responsibility”.

The central idea of Australia’s arc is to make explicit the responsibility that must go with a set of abiding interests. In the first decade of the 21st century, Australia in the South Pacific sought to be the security giver as well as the largest aid donor. In the second decade, Australia is grappling with a broader demand—its complex and sensitive role as the power with greatest responsibility in the region.

**Australia’s Arc of Responsibility**

Australia’s arc runs from Timor-Leste into the South Pacific, so the membership roll reads: Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Bougainville, Nauru, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The Autonomous Region of Bougainville is part of the arc, whether it eventually votes later this decade to stay in or to leave Papua New Guinea. If this is Australia’s arc of responsibility, then West Papua and Fiji cannot make the list. This is a concept where the relationship with Australia weighs alongside the geography.

Australia’s deeply-rooted strategic denial instincts mean that it always wants to be number one in the region while minimising any significant role for outside powers. This instinct is central to the military garrison duty Australia has performed in Timor-Leste since 1999 and the policing and military security role in the Solomon Islands since 2003.

The idea of Australia’s deep interest or responsibility in the arc is a founding element of the Australian Commonwealth, actually expressed in the Constitution. The Constitution makes no mention of the post of Prime Minister or the function of Cabinet government, but the regional role gets an explicit tick. Section 51 is at the heart of the Constitution, defining the legal powers of the Commonwealth over such areas as trade, currency, defence and communications. Subsection 29 identifies the power over External Affairs. The next clause, subsection 30, goes further and identifies the power over the “relations of the Commonwealth with the islands of the Pacific.”
The Pacific element in the Constitution reflects the way the presence of other powers in the Pacific in the 19th century helped to galvanise the six Australian states to act to make a nation. The traditional inability of the states and the federal government to agree on much at all—still, today, a defining characteristic of the federation—makes the original act of creation even more striking. The first major convention of the states to discuss federation in 1883 was driven by the immediate need to get a common policy to oppose French and German colonisation in the Pacific. That was why New Zealand and Fiji were also at that first Sydney conference.\(^4\) If you want to know why the Australia federation exists, or why the Australian Army is today transforming itself into a marine force, or why the aid budget looks as it does, the idea of Australia’s arc is useful.

Calling it Australia’s arc indicates Canberra’s ownership through the security role it proclaims in policy and action in the countries of the arc. As in much else, Papua New Guinea is foundational to such a view. Papua New Guinea will always be special for Australia—the central and fundamental Pacific relationship. Papua New Guinea has deep influence on the way Canberra views the rest of the region. Indeed, the way that Australia thinks about Papua New Guinea’s security has set standards for the entire arc. The formal security guarantee Australia gives Papua New Guinea has been extended in de facto form to the rest of Melanesia and Timor-Leste.

From the Australian perspective, a range of similar Melanesian-style problems run through a set of diverse countries. Conceptualising them as the Australian arc captures a set of concerns held by Australia. And, importantly, it points to the reality that Australia has given security guarantees—formal or de facto—in a way that confers a certain group membership on the arc.

Australia does not have a defence treaty with Timor-Leste of the sort it has with its former colony Papua New Guinea. But the deployment of Australian troops in Timor-Leste over the past decade is the hardest evidence of the nature and force of this de facto guarantee. Australia’s actions in the Solomon Islands are an equal expression of the security promise. Formal declarations of defence doctrine under the Howard Government became quite explicit about the extension of this de facto guarantee to the arc, elevating the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to the same level as Papua New Guinea, which has a treaty pledge that Canberra reads as meaning that “Australia would be prepared to commit forces to resist external aggression against PNG.”\(^5\)

The significant point is that Australian actions in the arc have broadened the guarantee to become a promise about maintaining internal stability as well as acting against the more remote threat of external aggression. In the Solomon Islands, particularly, Australia eventually acted to fulfill the promise expressed by the Howard Government’s 2000 Defence White Paper:

In the Southwest Pacific, as in Papua New Guinea, our aim is to maintain our position as the key strategic partner. Australia's interests in a stable and secure Southwest Pacific are matched by significant responsibilities as leader and regional power.⁶

The Rudd Government’s 2009 Defence White Paper echoed the claim of regional leadership and said the second priority task of the Defence Force, after the defence of Australia from direct attack, is “to contribute to stability and security in the South Pacific and East Timor”.⁷

Both sides of Australian politics have embraced the claim to be the region’s strategic guarantor. The abiding conundrum is how to make good on the promise and how to get the arc to accept, if not embrace, the role Australia proclaims for itself. The Howard Government’s new interventionism (dubbed “cooperative intervention” by Alexander Downer) gave way to the Labor era of “new partnership”. Both stances reflect an Australian urge to “do something” to confront problems in neighbouring states.

Canberra can reflect on the experiences and lessons of its most activist period in the arc since leaving Papua New Guinea in 1975—in Bougainville, Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands. Bougainville involved unarmed peace monitors; Timor-Leste was a military intervention authorised by the United Nations (UN); the Solomon Islands was a police-military regional assistance mission, operating on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum.

Different problems demanded different responses. At one extreme, in Timor-Leste, Australia led a UN force knowing that it was risking military conflict with Indonesian-backed forces. By contrast, in achieving a ceasefire and a peace deal in Bougainville, Australia had to understand how deeply compromised it was by its former colonial role. Canberra had to stand back as New Zealand showed the nous and the nimbleness to craft a deal between Papua New Guinea and the Bougainville parties; then Australia could step in to pay for it and provide the bulk of the unarmed peacekeepers to make the process work. A common feature of these vastly different cases is how such regional deployments can become long-term, even open-ended. In the absence of casualties, Australia’s voters seem quite prepared to support (or ignore) commitments in the arc running over many years.

⁷ Department of Defence, Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), p. 54.
In a classic bush-carpentry manner, Australia has been learning-by-doing. The actions have been ad hoc responses, often in moments of crisis. But once made, the commitments have been maintained and expanded. Despite the rhetoric of leadership, there was no overarching design. Australia’s extended roles in Bougainville, Timor-Leste and the Solomon Islands sometimes had an air of absent-minded amiability rather than great ambition, but the embrace of an Australian regional responsibility has been explicit.

**Leadership Needs Followship**

The decisive evolution in the role Australia has played in delivering security and some stability to the arc has not been matched in other realms. In diplomacy and the growth of regional institutions, Australia has suffered setbacks. In meeting its economic responsibilities in the South Pacific and Timor-Leste, Australia has stuck to the traditional aid approach. Aid spending has grown strongly but has not always shown the same imagination, energy and sense of urgency devoted to the security challenges. Australia has broadened its security role in the arc; it has not been able to achieve the matching task of enlarging its economic role in line with the aid expansion. Before looking at the economic realm, which is a slow failure of the status quo, consider the challenges to the institutional status quo in the region.

Fiji certainly does not qualify for membership of the Australian arc. Fiji is not the subject of a formal or de facto security guarantee from Australia because of the deep diplomatic divide that separates Canberra and Wellington from the military regime in Suva. That split is starting to have structural impacts on Pacific diplomacy. The diplomatic war with Fiji has inflicted collateral damage on regionalism—especially the definition of region that sees Australia and New Zealand as insiders not outsiders and which defines the Pacific Islands Forum as the preeminent regional institution.

The clawing and mauling between Australia, New Zealand and Fiji has rammed home the foreign relations truth that good intentions and promising policy get blown away when governments are intent on kicking each other. The diplomatic conflict has stalled the two big institution-building efforts centred on the Forum—the Pacific Plan and the regional free trade talks between Australia, New Zealand and the Islands (Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus).

Expelling Fiji from the Forum was the toughest call by the regional grouping in its history. The country that was central to creation of the Forum and houses its secretariat has been cast out since 2009. A Forum without Fiji is like ASEAN without Indonesia or Thailand; the Organisation of American States without Brazil or Argentina. What is unthinkable in other regional
organisations can be done in the Forum because of the role of Australia and New Zealand.

Apart from Australia and New Zealand, the Islands are certainly unanimous that Bainimarama's regime is worrying, unpredictable, even appalling. But the Island resolve, much less unanimity, on the amount of diplomatic muscle to be applied to Fiji has been painfully tested. It has been in Fiji's interest to resist Canberra and Wellington at every turn, to weaken the Forum, and to exclude Australia and New Zealand from other regional understandings or undertakings.

Suva’s strategy strikes at a central objective of Australian and New Zealand policy—always to have a major role in regional operations and endeavours as an expression of their rights and privileges as nations of the South Pacific. In this effort, the Forum reflects both Australia’s instincts and intentions. The softly-softly nature of the Pacific Way usually plays to Canberra’s comfort levels. Australia does not get all that it wants from the Forum—but it gets most of what it really wants.

In a sense, Australia and New Zealand get what they pay for. In total, Australia contributes 49 per cent of the Forum Secretariat’s $40 million budget; New Zealand gives 21 per cent.8 Add in the European Union, and these three pay 85 per cent of the Forum Secretariat bills. The 2012 review of the Forum Secretariat recommended that Island states should exercise greater “ownership” of the Secretariat:

In theory the governance framework for the Secretariat is simple. In reality it is complex, confusing and full of ambiguity. As a consequence the current arrangements do not deliver clear direction to the organisation.9

Such confusion is an inevitable reflection of the tensions that must run through an institution that tries to unite the interests of a group of nations ranging from a rich middle power that occupies a continent down to impoverished island micro states.

For the Islands, the Forum is a mechanism to manage relations with Australia and New Zealand, as well as other big players outside the grouping. For Australia, the Forum is a vehicle not just for regional consensus, but a mechanism to impose and police norms. Examples of this are the creation of the Forum’s Pacific Plan, negotiations on the PACER-Plus free trade agreement and, most dramatically, the expulsion of Fiji.

Since being ejected, Fiji has been able to exploit the perennial Pacific irritation at an Australia that often plays the twin roles of big brother and big

9 Ibid., p. 11.
Suva has sought to expand or create Pacific institutions that exclude Australia and New Zealand. The status of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) has grown, drawing on Fiji’s efforts, financial support from China, and the relatively strong economic performance of the Melanesian quartet (Papua New Guinea, Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu).

Islands Business magazine, based in Suva, editorialised that the MSG has had a “meteoric rise” in recent years, growing “to become a parallel force to be reckoned with in the region, alongside the 16-member Pacific Islands Forum”.

The real innovation by Fiji has been to foster the role at the UN of the Pacific Small Islands Developing States group. In September 2011 the Asian caucus at the UN changed its title to become the ‘Group of Asia and the Pacific Small Islands Developing States’. Building on the election Fiji’s regime has scheduled for 2014, Fiji is setting itself to run for election to one of Asia’s rotating seats on the UN Security Council. Fiji will campaign in Asia; Australia, still on its original UN perch in the Western European and Others group, had to run against Finland and Luxembourg in its successful bid for a UN Security Council seat in 2013-14.

An analysis by Richard Herr and Anthony Bergin argued that the emergence of the Pacific Small Islands Developing States group at the UN shows the alienation of Australia and New Zealand from the rest of the membership of the Pacific Islands Forum:

The erosion in Australia’s standing in Pacific regional affairs can be seen in rising sub-regionalism and faltering support for Australia’s lead on regional initiatives. The islands are displaying an increasingly independent fascination with Asia. They’re broadening unconventional diplomatic ties and preferring regional representation at the United Nations that excludes Australia. Thus, the coherence and robustness of the regional system are being tested at a time when it is divided as never before, as regional organisations adapt to a new and diversified security environment.

Australia and New Zealand are reaching out to Fiji, partly in recognition of its steps towards the promised 2014 election. Equally, however, Australia seeks to protect the Forum’s preeminent position and its own leadership claims. Jenny Hayward-Jones has judged that Australia’s tough love policy towards Fiji has failed, and that instead Suva has been able to develop new partnerships which undermine Australia’s influence: “Australia’s reputation

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10 New Caledonia is also represented in the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), via the Kanak Party, the FLNKS (Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste).
for regional leadership and as a creative middle power on the world stage is at risk of being diminished by the Fiji government’s resistance to pressure.”

**Getting Pacific People into Australia’s Pacific Policy**

In a small and quiet step, Australia is permanently opening its door for a few Islanders to do seasonal farm work. The Pacific worker pilot scheme was a fizzer—less than half the available Pacific worker spots in Australia were used during the three year test period. But the slow growth of the scheme meant there was little political or bureaucratic pain involved in making it permanent. And so, from July 2012, the Pacific worker program became a new fixture in Australia’s dealings with Timor-Leste and the South Pacific.

The initial failure of the Pacific worker scheme followed a familiar script: an Australian response to Pacific pleas eventually produced a scheme, that was packed with good intentions, but which did not quite deliver as advertised. The short answer for the failure of Pacific workers to get seasonal jobs on Australian farms is that foreign backpackers with holiday visas have done the work. The growers fear the risks and red tape of the Pacific scheme. To win, the Islanders have to beat the backpackers on productivity and reliability.

The broader significance of the scheme is that for the first time, the South Pacific superpower is doing something specifically for Pacific workers who want to keep living in the Pacific. The Islanders do not have to migrate to get access to the region’s economic powerhouse. The shift has been a long time coming, reflecting the limitations of a country that is happy to give aid to the Pacific, but finds it hard to give access to Pacific people.

A decade ago, any temporary right of entry for Pacific workers was a policy untouchable in Canberra. It was unthinkable because Australia had repeatedly bashed such concepts the moment they were proposed. Date the animosity from the moment in the 1969 when John Gorton finally and properly terminated the silly ministerial musings about Papua New Guinea becoming Australia’s seventh state. At the same time, Australia was on its journey from having a discriminatory to a non-discriminatory immigration policy.

In abandoning the White Australia policy, the nation went from discriminating against the Islanders (along with much of the rest of the world) to a purist position where it would not or could not discriminate in favour of its own

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neighbours. The syndrome was an important element in 1971 when Cabinet discussed the birth of the South Pacific Forum. The Foreign Affairs’ Cabinet submission talked about the need for “extreme sensitivity” to ensure only small steps in the Forum’s development so that Australia could avoid embarrassment over its migration policy.\(^\text{15}\)

One of the laws of politics is that no argument is ever finally settled and that is certainly the case with migration and Pacific workers. The 1984 review of overseas aid, the Jackson report, talked of a special migration program for the smallest islands. Thirteen years later, the Simons review of aid returned to what it called the “vexed issue” of migration for islanders.\(^\text{16}\) I had plenty of this history to draw on in February 2003 when I got up in a committee room in Parliament House to deliver a paper to the Liberal Party think tank, the Menzies Research Centre.\(^\text{17}\)

The paper banged away at Australia’s amnesia about our dynamic and vigorous Pacific history and what would always be our central role in the region. As a journalist, you get a lot of chances to question and annoy politicians, but actually to lecture them is a rare treat. I went for broke. Australia had to tackle the taboo that had endured for decades—labour mobility from the Islands. This should be seen as an issue of community, of security, or economic policy and aid, not merely a migration issue.

Shortly after that speech, a couple of excellent chaps from Foreign Affairs took me to lunch and gently but firmly told me I was crazy on the Pacific worker idea. The Immigration Department hated it, the Employment Department did not even want to think about it, and Foreign Affairs would not lose a layer of skin arguing for it. Beyond Planet Canberra, there was nobody pushing for special treatment for Pacific workers and the trade unions would actively fight the concept. Had I noticed that Australia prided itself on running a non-discriminatory immigration policy? So why start discriminating for a bunch of Islanders who had no real diplomatic heft and no Australian constituency?

Perhaps, though, I was sniffing the wind while my hosts were merely reciting history. A few months later Australia and the region were off to start the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands experiment, and

\(^{15}\) See: Stuart Doran, *Australia and the origins of the Pacific Islands Forum, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia in the World: The Foreign Affairs and Trade Files, No. 1* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004).


Canberra started to count the billion-dollar bill involved in propping up a near-as-dammit failed state in Melanesia. 18

One of the unsung heroes in the process of change was a Labor MP, Bob Sercombe, who served as the Opposition spokesman for Overseas Aid and Pacific Island Affairs from 2004 to 2007. He took up the Pacific worker idea as part of his thinking on the creation of a Pacific Community. And, most importantly, he got the trade unions on board, winning the backing of then president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Sharan Burrow. Unfortunately for the Pacific, Sercombe’s work suffered the fate predicted in one of Labor’s tougher sayings: No good deed goes unpunished. Thus, Sercombe did not have a chance to implement his ideas when Labor took office in 2007 because he had to vacate his Parliamentary seat to make way for the arrival in Canberra of one of Labor’s rising stars. Part of the Sercombe legacy was to inject some fresh thinking into an important part of Australia’s Pacific policy.

The emerging debate in Australia had been matched in New Zealand, feeding into the Island understanding of what might be possible. Fairly quickly, the labour mobility/seasonal worker argument moved from the margins onto the formal agenda of the Forum. This is how politics and policy get done. Not so long ago, in Canberra, this was bad policy and bad politics. Slowly it shifted to become a difficult policy option which was politically contested and subject to fresh bureaucratic re-examination. Then the debate began in earnest and new political possibilities emerged. New Zealand acted first and Australia followed.

Making the scheme permanent is one more stride in the effort to get some Pacific people into Australia’s Pacific policy, to broaden Australia’s understanding of how to meet its responsibilities in its own arc. A full understanding of those responsibilities would mean creating mechanisms to bring Pacific people into Australia through many doors—letting in skilled and unskilled workers as well as students. If Australia is to have a special place in the Pacific then Pacific people must have a place in Australia. Such a perspective would start to enlarge the answer to the recurrent question about Australia’s development aid to the Islands: What do we get for the money?

Opening up to Pacific people means moving beyond the simple formula that says aid policy equates to Pacific policy. This is the policy strait jacket that

18 There has been some academic quibbling about whether the Solomon Islands in 2003 merited the label of failed state or failing state; my short response is that if the Cabinet could not formally convene in Honiara for fear of being held hostage by armed bandits, then the apparatus of the state had been stretched to breaking point. This shapes my response to questions about what benefits have flowed from the expensive, decade-long, intervention experiment. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) certainly has not built all that optimists or critics would demand. RAMSI’s achievement was to stop what was in the process of happening—the intervention prevented a state system from collapsing.
has too often confined Canberra since the departure from Papua New Guinea in 1975. The narrow orthodoxy held that Pacific policy was essentially aid policy with a bit of diplomacy sprinkled on top and a defence guarantee held in reserve. The problem with having aid as your main or only policy instrument is that it gets all the blame as well as carrying all the promises; if the Islands are failing, Australian policy is failing and, ergo, aid is failing. The whole-of-government mantra now chanted in Canberra is a repudiation of the old formulation that Pacific policy amounted to aid policy.

The aid money still speaks loudly because Australia provides more than half of the international assistance that goes to the South Pacific. Each year for the past decade, Australia has provided about 53 per cent of the OECD-measured official development assistance in the region. Danielle Cave argues that the size of the aid budget dominates Australia's relationship with the region, making it difficult to move beyond the roles of donor and recipient:

Australian policymakers too often rest on the size of the aid budget. When in the Pacific Islands, aid announcements pepper the media releases of any visiting Minister or Parliamentary Secretary. But this over-reliance on the aid program has stifled Pacific policy in Australia and resulted in a lack of creative policy thinking. We fail to think through and design Pacific policy that builds Australia's goodwill in the region.

The Pacific worker scheme is a small window onto the economic and political challenge to Australia's sense of what it must do in its arc of responsibility. The Forum Pacific Plan and the free trade agreement that Australia and New Zealand are negotiating with the Islands (PACER Plus) are further elements in defining this challenge, to enlarge what is possible.

The Pacific Plan calls for Islands to cooperate or merge functions in many areas of government and administration. Australia and New Zealand need to offer the Islands incentives to sacrifice sovereignty for greater efficiency and better economic performance. The soft power logic says that the opportunity for closer interaction of Island societies and economies with Australia and New Zealand is the surest means of achieving such change.

The slow progress of PACER Plus since the negotiations were launched in August 2009, shows the difficulty of creating something more than a traditional free trade agreement. Australia says its primary objective is to promote the economic development of the Islands through greater regional trade and economic integration. The tensions with Fiji have been a further complication in meeting Canberra's promise that Australia's only aim is to

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help the Islands, not itself. (When God creates trade negotiators, he gives them a high boredom threshold, strong wills and even stronger bladders—but large helpings of vision or imagination tend to be optional.) The Islands already have duty-free and quota-free access to Australia through the 1981 South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement (SPARTECA). What is left to negotiate? Goods and services move freely, it is now about people.

If PACER Plus is really going to deliver new opportunities for the Islands then it will be in tackling the taboo of labour mobility. The size of that issue explains the sluggish PACER Plus process, in the same way that the Pacific seasonal worker scheme had such a slow birth. The central conundrum is about what more Canberra is prepared to give to meet its economic responsibilities to the countries of the Australian arc; and in posing the problem in solely economic terms, Fiji does become part of the arc. The economic realm is the area where Australia can most easily step around its differences with Fiji’s regime.

Australia’s role as the major aid donor to the Pacific has now been matched by its performance in delivering on its security guarantee to the region. The meaning of the promise to resist outside aggression has been significantly broadened to become a pledge to help maintain internal stability. Both the aid and security pledges are of enduring importance to the countries of the Australian arc. Yet acting as the regional superpower and aid banker is not a role that ever attracts much thanks. The charges of big brother bullying and blundering are as permanent as the geography of the arc.

Australia’s sphere of interest is not always its sphere of influence. Certainly, beyond the ability to deploy dollars along with military and police power, Australia is having some trouble achieving its aims in the arc. Australia’s interest in the arc is demonstrated by its promise of leadership and aid; the limits of influence are revealed by the difficulty in getting Island states to follow where Australia wants to lead. The offer of leadership always presupposes some ability to motivate followers.

The challenge for Australia is to focus not just on its interests, but on the contests taking place inside the small polities of the South Pacific. To be followed, Australia will have to prove that it is a leader that can listen. And Canberra does not have to listen very hard to look beyond what it delivers in aid and security to the even harder realm of people policy. If Australia is to

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have a special responsibility in its own arc, then the people of that arc must have a role in Australia.

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Papua New Guinea: Issues of External and Internal Security

Ronald May

Since independence in 1975 Papua New Guinea has enjoyed a generally benign external security environment, in which the principal challenges have come from the management of the borders with Indonesia to the west and the Solomon Islands to the east, and illegal fishing. Security threats from illegal migration and international crime have been of relatively minor concern. More significant for Papua New Guinea have been issues of internal security, including “tribal fighting”, raskolism, threats to resource projects, violence against women, and election-related conflicts.

Australia and Papua New Guinea have a long, and continuing, association based on geographical proximity and colonial history. This article argues that relations have been generally good, but that changing dynamics within the Asia Pacific region suggest a need for continuing close attention to the relationship.

Australia and Papua New Guinea have long been linked by geographical proximity and by colonial history. Security concerns were a major element of Australia’s early interest in the island of New Guinea and these concerns were reinforced by the Japanese invasion and occupation of New Guinea in 1942-1945 and Indonesian expansionism in the 1960s.

Security issues are still an important element in relations between the two countries, but their interests do not necessarily coincide and security priorities are subject to the changing external and internal environments in which they operate. Maintenance of good relations requires continuous review of the issues and their relevance to the respective players.

Papua New Guinea’s Transition to Independence

In 1951 the Australian colonial administration revived the Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR), which had been formed in Papua New Guinea during the Second World War. Until 1964 the PIR formed part of the Australian Army’s Northern Command, whose headquarters were in Brisbane. Subsequently, headquarters were shifted to Port Moresby, though most of the PIR’s officers were Australian and orders came from Canberra.

With the approach of independence, in the early 1970s there was debate about whether an independent Papua New Guinea should have a defence force, as some commentators both within and outside Papua New Guinea saw a well-organised defence force as a potential threat to the emerging democratic state. In the event, the PIR formed the core of the Papua New
Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) which was established in 1973. Just before independence in 1975 defence powers were transferred from Australia to Papua New Guinea and a Papua New Guinean, Brigadier-General Ted Diro, became commanding officer of the force.¹

At independence, Papua New Guinea clearly expected a defence treaty with Australia,² but this was not forthcoming; instead in an exchange of letters and a joint statement in 1977 the two countries affirmed that their governments “attached high importance to continuing the close co-operation between their two countries in defence matters” and declared their intent “to consult ... about matters affecting their common security interests”. Australia also undertook to provide continuing assistance to the PNGDF through its Defence Cooperation Program.

Papua New Guinea’s foreign policy at independence was one of “universalism”: “friend to all, and enemy to none”. Subsequently this was modified to a policy of “active and selective engagement”, to which was subsequently added the elaboration of “look North [to Asia] and work the Pacific”.³ Central to the latter has been Papua New Guinea’s prominent role in the Pacific Islands Forum and the Melanesian Spearhead Group.

Papua New Guinea’s External Security Environment

Papua New Guinea has continued to enjoy a generally benign external security environment, though not without some challenges. The principal issues for Papua New Guinea’s external security have been in three main areas: the border with Indonesia to the west; the border with the Solomon Islands to the east; and incursions by foreign fishing vessels in Papua New Guinea’s territorial waters.

The Border with Indonesia

Papua New Guinea shares a border with the Indonesian provinces of West Papua and Papua (formerly the single province of Irian Jaya). Papuan nationalists, led by the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM, Free Papua Movement) and more recently the Komite Nasional Papua Barat (KNPB, West Papua National Committee), have maintained a continuing campaign for West Papuan separatism and a review of the 1969 so-called “Act of Free

² See: May, The Changing Role of the Military, p. 36.
Choice” (in fact, an act of “no choice”, conducted in the presence of a UN special representative), by which West Papua moved from a United Nations Temporary Executive Authority to incorporation within the Indonesian Republic.4

In the early 1970s there was significant sympathy among Papua New Guinea’s emerging leaders for the separatist ambitions of their Melanesian brothers in the former Dutch territory. However, Papua New Guinea recognised Indonesian sovereignty in West Papua after 1969 (as did Australia) and within its capacity sought to deny the OPM access to Papua New Guinea. Despite this, OPM camps were set up in the dense jungle on Papua New Guinea’s side of the border, which was a source of some tension in relations between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Regular crack-downs on West Papuan groups by Indonesia led to frequent border crossings by OPM supporters and ordinary villagers, and occasional incursions by Indonesian soldiers. In 1984 some 10,000 border crossers sought refuge in Papua New Guinea after the Indonesia military acted against Papuan nationalists who had sought to raise the West Papuan flag. The Indonesian military made unauthorised border incursions in pursuit of alleged OPM supporters who sought refuge in Papua New Guinea. In an escalation of tensions, Papua New Guinea took its grievances to the UN General Assembly.

By the late 1980s relations between the two countries had improved and the two had signed a Treaty of Mutual Respect, Friendship and Cooperation.5 However, the border remains a continuing irritant in Papua New Guinea-Indonesia relations. West Papuan separatism has not gone away, and the erosion of concessions made by the Indonesian Government to West Papuans after the demise of President Suharto, continued immigration from other parts of Indonesia, and sustained military repression and human rights abuses in West Papua, have fuelled Papuan nationalist sentiments and separatist demands and created a vicious cycle of repression and confrontation. Papua New Guinea has resisted Indonesian proposals for joint border patrols, and with the PNGDF’s capacity to patrol the border limited by its resources, the potential for future border “incidents” is high.6

6 See, for example, Peter King, West Papua and Indonesia Since Suharto: Independence, Autonomy or Chaos? (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2004); Richard Chauvel, The Papua Conflict; Jakarta’s Perceptions and Policies (Washington: East-West Center, 2004); International Crisis Group, ‘Indonesia: The Deepening Impasse in Papua’, Asia Briefing No. 108.
THE BORDER WITH THE SOLOMON ISLANDS
In the east, a similarly arbitrary colonial boundary separates Papua New Guinea from the Solomon Islands, although there has been continuing traditional movement across the island chain. During the Bougainville rebellion (see below) members of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army regularly crossed into the Solomon Islands—for some time with the effective blessing of the Solomon Islands Government—to escape the PNGDF, and weapons and medicines were imported into Bougainville through the Solomon Islands. In a mirror image of what was happening on Papua New Guinea’s western border, on more than one occasion PNGDF soldiers crossed illegally into the Solomon Islands (in one instance attempting to annex a small island in the Solomon Islands territory), drawing complaints from successive Solomon Islands governments.

Since the end of the Bougainville conflict, this issue has largely disappeared, although the reported continuing flow of weapons into Papua New Guinea through the Solomon Islands still poses security concerns.

ILLEGAL FISHING
The operation of illegal foreign fishing vessels in Papua New Guinea waters, particularly in the “Dogleg” area to the west of the Papuan Gulf, has been a serious issue for Papua New Guinea, especially given its limited capacity to monitor, let alone control, its extensive territorial waters. Some attempts have been made to address the problems of illegal fishing on a regional basis through the Forum Fisheries Agency and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. Australia has supported the efforts of Papua New Guinea and other Pacific island states to improve their maritime security and protect their fisheries through the Pacific Patrol Boat Program and assistance in aerial surveillance.

OTHER CONCERNS
In addition to these concerns, in recent years a range of non-traditional security concerns has emerged—though arguably the issues identified have been of greater relevance to Papua New Guinea’s allies, particularly Australia, than to Papua New Guinea itself.

Following 9/11 2001, international terrorism has been added to the list of external security threats, and, largely at the urging of Australia (which has provided some logistic assistance) and the United States, measures have been taken to upgrade maritime and airport security. While the threat of a terrorist strike cannot be entirely dismissed, the likelihood of terrorist activity in Papua New Guinea is slight: there are no terrorist groups in Papua New


7 See Dinnen, this volume.
Guinea and no obvious constituency for them (there is a small group of foreign Muslims and Papua New Guinean converts, but the group has no apparent radical tendencies). In small-scale Papua New Guinea society, the activities of outsiders (and indeed of Papua New Guineans) tend to attract close scrutiny from neighbours, which would make terrorist activities difficult to sustain.

For similar reasons, and given fairly tight border security, people smuggling, though sometimes listed as a security concern, is not a major issue for Papua New Guinea. Apart from the border crossers from West Papua, mentioned above, there has been some illegal migration to Papua New Guinea, in some cases of people (mistakenly) perceiving Papua New Guinea as an easy entry route to Australia; there has even been at least one boatload of prospective refugees who unintentionally made landfall in Papua New Guinea en route to Australia. And there has been a steady stream of illegal migrants from China. Some of this illegal migration (and some legal issuing of Papua New Guinea passports) seems to have been facilitated by corrupt officials in overseas diplomatic posts and in one disturbing incident the machine used to print Papua New Guinea passports was stolen. But stringent visa conditions, closer oversight of officials working overseas, and occasional raids to round-up foreigners working without work permits (especially those working in occupations reserved for Papua New Guineans) have kept the number of unwanted foreigners within limits.

Perhaps more serious are reports of Papua New Guinean links to international crime. From time to time there have been reports of “Chinese triads” operating in the country and of a trade in drugs (marijuana) for guns across the Torres Strait border. When coupled with the reality of raskol gangs in Papua New Guinea (see below) and corruption within the public sector (including the police), these reports must be taken seriously, but the evidence of such activities is still modest. For most Papua New Guineans, vulnerability to the activities of foreign “carpet baggers” and scam merchants, for example in forestry and in pyramid finance schemes, may be cause for greater concern.

For Australia, with its relative abundance of resources to address the issues, these non-traditional security threats occupy the minds of security planners. But for Papua New Guinea, external security threats, both traditional and

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10 A report in Islands Business, July 2012, however, suggests that “Between 15,000 and 20,000 foreigners, mostly Asian, are believed to be residing and working in Papua New Guinea”.
11 A range of pertinent issues is addressed in Beno Boehe and John McFarlane (eds), Australia and Papua New Guinea. Crime and the Bilateral Relationship (Canberra: Australian Defence Studies Centre, University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, 2000).
non-traditional, are substantially outweighed by the challenges it faces with respect to internal security.

**Internal Security**

Before European contact, “tribal” fighting between Papua New Guinea’s fragmented local groups was endemic across much of the country. Under the colonial administration inter-group fighting diminished, but it continued, especially in the highlands where the Australian administrative presence was not well established until the 1960s. “Law and order” problems were still a major issue in the years preceding independence in 1975, and were probably exacerbated by forces set in train by the process of “modernisation”: increased competition for land due to the introduction of cash crops and a rapid increase in population; the impact of large-scale resource projects; the breakdown of traditional authority structures at the local level; intense competition for electoral office (in 2002 “failed elections” were declared in six of the country’s electorates as a result of election-related inter-group fighting in the Southern Highlands); and the introduction of motor vehicles (and hence motor vehicle accidents) and alcohol. Over the past two decades there has been a marked increase in the use of automatic weapons in inter-group fighting and in general criminality.

There are several dimensions to the law and order problem.¹²

Inter-group, or “tribal”, fighting has deep historical and cultural roots, including mechanisms for at least temporary peace and reconciliation, but has evolved in new forms with the introduction of guns and the interplay of traditional rivalries and electoral competition.

*Raskolism*—essentially, criminal gangs—began to emerge both in towns and in rural areas in the 1970s largely amongst unemployed youth (especially in urban squatter settlements) and often based on localised ethnic group affiliation. Over time, *raskol* gangs have tended to become more heterogeneous, more sophisticated, and probably more likely to be associated with prominent local political figures (for whom the term “warlord” has come into common usage). The predatory behaviour of *raskols* in some rural areas, especially in the highlands, has curtailed economic activities such as coffee buying and led the closure of banks and other businesses.¹³

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¹³ For example, see Nicole Haley and R.J. May (eds), *Conflict and Resource Development in the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2007), chapter 1.
Within communities, violence against women is also a widespread problem.\textsuperscript{14} Apart from the personal and communal costs of domestic violence, this mindset helps explain the level of political participation by women in Papua New Guinea, which is one of the lowest in the region. To the extent that violence against women has made some parents reluctant to send their daughters to school, this has far-reaching longer-term implications for the status of women.

Threats to resource projects, from disgruntled landowners and others impacted by mining or other resource-exploiting operations, have become another aspect of the law and order problem. The outstanding case here is Bougainville,\textsuperscript{15} where what began essentially as a protest movement among the younger generation of landowners in the area adjacent to the Bougainville gold and copper mine escalated into a declaration of independence and a virtual civil war which lasted for over a decade, cost numerous lives, and closed the mine, which at the time contributed around 40 per cent of Papua New Guinea’s exports and 17 per cent of its government revenue. Bougainville may be an extreme instance of the power which landowners can exercise over a big resource project, but virtually all of Papua New Guinea’s mining, gas and petroleum projects have run into confrontation with landowner groups, whose expectations of the benefits to be gained from such projects are often unrealistic and for whom formal agreements are infinitely negotiable.

Increased migration from Asia, especially illegal migration from China, and the expansion of Asian business interests have produced sporadic outbursts of ‘anti-Chinese’ sentiment, including protests against the largely Chinese-owned Ramu nickel mine and occasional attacks on ‘Chinese’ businesses. Though not on the scale witnessed in the Solomon Islands in 2006, the potential exists for anti-Asian riots.\textsuperscript{16}

Numerous measures have been taken to deal with law and order problems, from the passage of an \textit{Inter-Group Fighting Act} in 1977, the creation of police mobile squads and the call-out of the PNGDF in states of emergency, to the creation of village court magistrates and provincial peace and good order committees. The PNGDF was first called out to assist police following the declaration of state of emergency in response to rising urban crime in the national capital, Port Moresby, in 1984. It was involved in several further operations with police during the 1980s and 1990s, including its heavy commitment to the Bougainville conflict. More recently the PNGDF and


\textsuperscript{15} For a comprehensive account of the Bougainville conflict and peace process see Anthony J. Regan, \textit{Light Intervention. Lessons from Bougainville} (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010).


A continuing issue in dealing with the problems of law and order is the capacity of the RPNGC. Faced with daunting tasks of policing, the RPNGC is under-resourced in terms of pay, housing and transportation.\textsuperscript{17} Police morale is generally low, and in recent times the RPNGC has been factionalised and politicised at senior levels. In 2002, when “failed elections” were declared in the six Southern Highlands electorates, the provincial police commander complained that his officers could not contain the violence because they were not only outnumbered but out-gunned. Not surprisingly, under these conditions, police—especially the police mobile squads—have been frequently accused of human rights abuses\textsuperscript{18} and the state has paid out substantial amounts of compensation for police actions in which property has been destroyed and civilians abused.

With regard to the PNGDF, the post-independence military coup predicted by many in the early 1970s has not materialised, though there have been a number of relatively minor confrontations between the PNGDF and the government. These have included: the “Sandline affair”, in which the PNGDF commander intervened to abort a covert operation by the government in 1997 to use “military consultants”, in conjunction with the PNGDF, in an attempt to end the Bougainville conflict;\textsuperscript{19} a mutiny at Moem Barracks in Wewak, where soldiers briefly occupied the barracks and destroyed some buildings in protest against conditions of service and proposals to downsize the Force;\textsuperscript{20} and the recent (January 2012) short-lived mutiny by a group of soldiers supported by Sir Michael Somare who pressed for acceptance of a Supreme Court ruling in Somare’s favour during the political impasse which followed the parliamentary ousting of Somare as prime minister in 2011 (see below). I have argued elsewhere that a military coup seems unlikely in Papua New Guinea, but the possibility of a coalition

\textsuperscript{17} See Dinnen, \textit{Law and Order in a Weak State}, pp. 53-4. Dinnen notes that in 1975, when crime rates were relatively low, the ratio of police to population was 1:476; by the late 1990s, with rising crime rates, the ratio had fallen to 1:800; current estimates place the ratio at around 1:1400.


of disgruntled soldiers and opportunistic politicians challenging government decisions cannot be ruled out.  

Deterioration in government service delivery also poses security risks for Papua New Guinea’s citizens. Apart from a high incidence of HIV/AIDS, the poor state of Papua New Guinea’s health system has resulted in recent outbreaks of cholera and tuberculosis (leading to an influx of people from Papua New Guinea’s Western Province into Australia’s Torres Strait islands seeking treatment), and poor performance on most health indicators. A poorly performing health sector leaves the country vulnerable to imported viruses. Human health issues, and the potential spread of plant and animal diseases, pose external threats to Australia, which have been addressed in part by regular consultation between health and quarantine officials from the two countries.

Papua New Guinea’s geography and weather patterns raise further security risks in terms of susceptibility to earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, floods, mudslides and droughts, and the longer-term effects of climate change. The Carteret islanders in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville are already reportedly threatened by rising sea levels and likely to become amongst the world’s first “climate change refugees”. Papua New Guinea’s capacity to respond to such natural disasters is limited.

The Challenges Ahead

Papua New Guinea is commonly perceived as politically unstable, even though to the end of July 2012 the country had had only six prime ministers in thirty-seven years, elections had been held regularly on schedule, and all changes of government had followed constitutional procedures. All governments to date, however, have been coalitions (since 2002, coalitions of more than ten parties). Coalitions have been unstable, and up to 2002 no government had survived a full parliamentary term (most losing office as a result of a vote of no confidence against the prime minister). In 2001 an Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC) sought to create greater political stability by strengthening parties and providing sanctions against MPs who switched parties. Subsequently, the government of Sir Michael Somare (2002-2007) became the first to survive a full parliamentary term, though this owed less to the provisions of the OLIPPAC (which in 2003 proved to be largely ineffective in maintaining party cohesion) than to the Somare coalition’s large majority, which it used to

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21 Ibid. p. 6.
avoid votes of no confidence by adjourning parliament and controlling parliamentary procedures.

Somare was re-elected as prime minister in 2007, heading another larger coalition, but tensions soon appeared within the coalition. Then in July 2010 the Supreme Court ruled against certain provisions of the OLIPPAC, leaving the way open for renewed “party hopping”. Several coalition MPs crossed the floor.

In August 2011, while Somare was in Singapore receiving medical attention, the parliament, ignoring constitutional requirements, declared that the prime ministership was vacant and elected Peter O’Neill to replace Somare. The parliament’s actions were challenged and in December 2011 the Supreme Court upheld the challenge, but O’Neill and his supporters (who formed a clear majority of the parliament) chose to ignore the court—having already attempted to block the challenge and dismiss the chief justice. From August 2011 to June 2012 this political impasse continued, although the public service and (after an initial division) the police fell into line behind O’Neill.24

A scheduled national election in June 2012 promised a way out of the impasse, but in early 2012 attempts by O’Neill’s erratic Deputy Prime Minister Belden Namah to postpone the election, and an ambivalent reaction by O’Neill, threatened to create a serious constitutional crisis. In the event, the electoral commission refused to back down from commitment to the election and with over 3400 candidates having paid their candidate’s fees and out campaigning there was no stopping the electoral process.

By late July results had been declared in nearly all electorates and it was apparent that O’Neill, as leader of the party with the largest number of seats, would be invited to form government. On 2 August 2012, a year after his controversial political coup against Somare, O’Neill was duly elected prime minister, heading another large coalition. In a particularly Papua New Guinean turn of events, Somare—who before the election had promised, if elected, to put O’Neill and his supporters behind bars—joined O’Neill as a coalition partner, and Namah, who had fallen out with O’Neill during the election, moved to head a small parliamentary opposition group.

Once again, Papua New Guinea has come back from the brink of what appeared to be a serious constitutional crisis, although it remains to be seen, first, whether permanent damage has been done to the relationship between the legislature and the judiciary, and, secondly, whether the O’Neill-led

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coalition will prove stable or will give way to another period of what Papua New Guineans have referred to as “yo-yo politics”.

Achieving good governance will be particularly important on two counts. A major liquified natural gas (LNG) project, based in the Southern Highlands and scheduled to come on stream in 2014 and to produce revenue flows to government in 2018, is expected to double the size Papua New Guinea’s GDP and fund a substantial rise in the provision of government services. Expectations are high, as is the potential for landowner discontent. Successful management of the prospective benefits of the LNG project will call for good governance. Secondly, under the terms of the Bougainville Agreement of 2001 which marked the end of the Bougainville conflict, a referendum on the future status of Bougainville—to include the option of independence—is to be held within the period 2015-2020. Whether Bougainvilleans decide to maintain their present autonomy or vote for independence may be determined largely by relations between the national government and Bougainville over the next few years. And if Bougainville decides to separate, it remains to be seen if the rest of Papua New Guinea will accept the decision.

Implications for Australia

Relations between Australia and Papua New Guinea since the latter’s independence have been generally good. But the relationship is not symmetrical and there is always likely to be some resentment on Papua New Guinea’s part of Australia’s colonial past and its continuing role in Pacific affairs. Many Papua New Guineans perceive Australia as attempting to exert influence over Papua New Guinea and other the Pacific island states (and over the Pacific Islands Forum and Melanesian Spearhead Group), and see Australia’s substantial development assistance as “boomerang aid” which benefits Australians more than it benefits Papua New Guinea. The chairman of Papua New Guinea’s anti-corruption Taskforce Sweep has also described Australia as a “Cayman Islands” in relation to the laundering and housing of proceeds of corruption in Papua New Guinea. These attitudes partly account for the “Look North” emphasis in Papua New Guinea’s foreign policy, and the fostering of closer relations with China, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Following on from the exchange of letters in 1977, Papua New Guinea and Australia signed a Joint Declaration of Principles Guiding Relations Between Papua New Guinea and Australia (JDP) in 1987. The JDP reaffirmed the basic elements of the security relationship, though Papua New Guinea’s prime minister at the time, Paias Wingti, saw it as “an improvement” on the

25 See ACIL Tasman Pty Ltd, PNG LNG Economic Impact Study (Melbourne: ACIL Tasman, 2009).
26 Speech by Sam Koim to AUSTRAC Major Reporters Meeting, Sydney, 4 October 2012.
1977 undertaking, and his defence secretary described it as “an effective guarantee of Australian commitment”, saying, “Papua New Guinea considers Australia as a security guarantor in the event of uncertainty and threats”.27 Subsequently, following reviews by Papua New Guinea of its security needs and by Australia of its security assistance programs with Papua New Guinea, an Agreed Statement on Security Cooperation was signed by Australia’s Prime Minister Hawke and Papua New Guinea’s Prime Minister Namaliu in 1991. A significant feature of this document was the agreement that “Internal security needs are to be given the highest priority”.

Security relations between Australia and Papua New Guinea were again reviewed as part of wider examination of Australia’s relations with the Pacific island states by the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in 200328 and 2009.29 Both reports identified issues of concern—including threats from terrorism and transnational crime, border management capability (and specifically the porous nature of the border with Indonesia), and internal security issues, including vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change, outlined programs already in place to address common security concerns, and made recommendations for further action.

Apart from the Defence Cooperation Program, Australia has supported a variety of joint initiatives, bilateral and regional, to support the Law and Justice Sector, improve Papua New Guinea’s border management and enforcement capabilities, combat transnational crime, and improve the country’s capacity to respond to natural disasters. An Enhanced Cooperation Program (ECP) was launched in 2004 and involved some sixty public servants and 210 police from Australia to serve in line positions in Papua New Guinea at a cost of $A1.1 billion over five years. However, the ECP had a mixed reception and was largely abandoned when the Papua New Guinea Supreme Court ruled against the enabling Papua New Guinea legislation; the Australian police contingent and some public servants were subsequently withdrawn.

Australia’s development assistance and defence cooperation support for Papua New Guinea are likely to remain significant for both countries. Australia’s bilateral aid program to Papua New Guinea, at $A492 million in 2012/13, is its second largest, behind Indonesia, and is Papua New Guinea’s largest source of overseas development assistance; Papua New Guinea is the largest component ($A21 million in 2012/13) in Australia’s Defence Cooperation Program. But this does not buy Australia more than a very

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27 May, The Changing Role of the Military, p. 36.
limited, and changeable, influence over Papua New Guinea’s security policies.

Relations between Papua New Guinea and Australia reached something of a nadir during an interventionist phase in the latter stages of the Howard Government, but in March 2008 Australia’s incoming Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Somare co-signed the “Port Moresby Declaration”, which set down Australia’s commitment to a new era of cooperation with the Pacific island nations. The following month at an Australia-Papua New Guinea ministerial forum Papua New Guinea’s foreign minister welcomed the ‘rebirth’ of relations between the two counties. In a joint statement the two countries committed to negotiations on a new bilateral Partnership for Development to achieve improved development outcomes in Papua New Guinea. The ECP was subsequently replaced by a Strongim Gavman program, which was a somewhat less ambitious assistance package, and a renewed policing partnership between the Australian Federal Police and the RPNGC was endorsed. Other important recent initiatives have included the creation of a bilateral Health Issues Committee and a Papua New Guinea-Australia Forest Carbon Partnership.

Australia’s relations with the incoming government of Peter O’Neill are likely to remain sound, but, as always, maintaining good relations will require sensitivity on Australia’s part. As ABC journalist Sean Dorney once said:

one of the biggest problems Australia has in dealing with Papua New Guinea … [is that] too many Australians who know too little about the country tend to believe they have the solutions for Papua New Guinea’s problems.

Moreover, with the growing influence of China, and to a lesser extent Indonesia and Malaysia, and the changing dynamics of the Pacific Islands Forum and Melanesian Spearhead Group, the context in which Australia conducts its relations with Papua New Guinea has become more complex.

To maintain good relations, Australia must improve its understanding of Papua New Guinea, through closer government-to-government and people-to-people relations, and resist the temptation to act as though it knows what

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32 Dorney, The Sandline Affair, p. 338.
is best for Papua New Guineans. For its part, Papua New Guinea must lift the standard of governance and demonstrate to Australian taxpayers that Australia’s development assistance is being well used.

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The Solomon Islands—RAMSI, Transition and Future Prospects

Sinclair Dinnen

The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was deployed to the Solomon Islands almost ten years ago following a short but debilitating internal conflict. Developments on the ground and in RAMSI’s understanding of the small Pacific island nation have led to significant changes in the mission’s orientation and manner of engagement. Appreciation of the deeper structural challenges facing the Solomon Islands, most of which pre-dated the conflict, indicates that substantial international support will be needed for many years to come. The external security lens through which the Solomon Islands was primarily viewed at the outset of the mission is being progressively replaced by a more context-specific development perspective.

The deployment of the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in July 2003 was viewed by many as a significant shift in Australia’s relations with its near neighbours in the Southwest Pacific. For some, the move from a traditional reliance on the soft power of aid and diplomacy to a more ‘hands-on’ approach represented a paradigm shift in Australia’s regional relations. What others referred to as Australia’s “new interventionism”, comprised a robust and open-ended form of engagement underpinned by a powerful security imperative. However, there were also continuities with past approaches. Australia had long been involved in state-building in the Pacific and had assumed a leading role in earlier interventions in Timor-Leste and Bougainville. RAMSI also demonstrated Australia’s alignment with broader currents in post-Cold War international strategic thinking among Western powers that had witnessed a progressive merging of security and development agendas; a convergence that accelerated dramatically following the 9/11 attacks against the United States in 2001.

RAMSI was mobilised in direct response to a request from the Solomon Islands Government. Ethnic tensions (known locally as “the tension”) between the people of Guadalcanal and Malaita, the two largest islands, erupted in 1998. Around 35,000, mainly Malaitan, settlers were displaced from peri-urban areas surrounding the national capital, Honiara, and armed skirmishes occurred between rival militias. The Royal Solomon Islands

3 See, for example, Mark Duffield, Global Governance and the New Wars (London: Zed Books, 2001).
Police Force (RSIPF) fractured along ethnic lines, contributing to a breakdown in government authority. While a peace agreement brokered by the Australian and New Zealand governments in Townsville in October 2000 ended the spectre of an all-out ethnic conflict, the country remained militarised and ex-militants and renegade police engaged in opportunistic violence in Honiara and adjoining areas. Government revenues dropped drastically with the closure of major commercial enterprises, essential services ground to a halt, while the compensation process adopted as an instrument of peacemaking became rapidly corrupted. By 2003 it was clear that the Solomon Islands Government was incapable of resolving the national crisis without external assistance.

Mobilised under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum, RAMSI was welcomed by most Solomon Islanders. Although regional in character, the mission is led by Australia, which also supplies the bulk of funding (around A$200-250 million per annum), personnel and other resources. Smaller but significant contributions have come from New Zealand and other Forum members. The rapid and peaceful manner in which security was restored by the Participating Police Force (PPF), with military back-up, remains the mission's most tangible achievement. RAMSI's composition, focus and manner of engagement have evolved considerably over the past ten years. Restoring security was the first step in an ambitious state-building exercise to strengthen the central agencies of government and enable investor-led growth. Since 2011, the mission has moved into a transitional phase entailing a process of graduated drawdown.

While RAMSI's initial successes attracted well-deserved praise, much remains to be done in order to fulfil the mission's prescriptions for a stable, secure and self-sufficient Solomon Islands. Outstanding questions include the sustainability of gains made over the last decade and the extent to which the island nation's own institutions and leaders can maintain and build on these. Can the Solomon Islands meet the expectations of its rapidly growing population without substantial international assistance? Many of the structural factors and conflict stresses that contributed to the original tension remain extant, and some are likely to grow in the years ahead. The first section of this article examines the larger strategic context of the intervention that helped shape its character and priorities. This is followed by a section on the background to the tension and the factors contributing to the crisis. Section three looks at RAMSI's evolution since 2003 and its principal achievements. The final section considers the country's future prospects as the mission begins to drawdown.

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4 In the absence of a military force, the police constitute the sole coercive and enforcement agency of the Solomon Islands state.
The Strategic Context of Intervention

The Australian Government’s decision to intervene in the Solomon Islands in 2003 resulted from a confluence of strategic considerations. Concerns with regional instability had been growing in Australian policy circles from the late 1990s following political upheavals in Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. Combined with the limited impact of traditional approaches, these concerns underscored the need for more effective forms of engagement on the part of Australia as the leading regional power.

Australia’s view of its own national interests and regional leadership responsibilities also changed following the 9/11 attacks against the United States and subsequent bombings in Bali and Jakarta in 2002 and 2003. The American-led ‘war on terror’ established a new lens for viewing the phenomenon of ‘state failure’; linking it directly to the generation of transnational security threats to regional and global security. This, in turn, provided the justification for a spate of international interventions in post-conflict and fragile states, and was adopted by the Australian Government as the official rationale for its intervention in the Solomon Islands. The clearest articulation was made by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in an influential report on the Solomon Islands. Identifying the archipelagic nation as the region’s first ‘failing state’, ASPI warned of it becoming a “petri dish in which transnational and non-state security threats can develop and breed”, and called for the Howard Government “to reconsider the policy paradigm that has shaped Australia’s approach to our Southwest Pacific neighbours ever since they became independent”.

A “sustained and comprehensive multinational effort” was proposed for the Solomon Islands, with the restoration of law and order to be followed by a substantial state-building exercise to “build new political structures and security institutions and address underlying social and economic problems”.

The timing and shape of the intervention in the Solomon Islands owed as much to Australia’s adoption of the ‘liberal peace’ model being promulgated by the global north as the antidote to an ungovernable global south as it did to actual events on the ground in the Pacific island nation. Consideration of the particularities of local context was to a large extent subordinated to the application of the larger strategic framing and its formulaic policy

7 Ibid., p. 7.
8 Ibid., p. 39.
prescriptions. These entailed robust interventions with a strong accent on security, state-building and economic reform. Each of these elements is reflected in the three pillars around which RAMSI’s state-building engagement is now organised: law and justice; the machinery of government; and economic governance. While beleaguered authorities in Honiara had been requesting external intervention since 2000, what had changed by 2003, “was the Australian government’s reading of the situation in Solomon Islands and its implications for Australia”. This reading, in turn, represented a shift away “from a particularist and developmental lens to a global and security lens in viewing Pacific developments”.

**Background to the Tension**

The Solomon Islands has never had a ‘strong’ or ‘effective’ state as measured by its institutional capabilities, ability to project authority throughout its territory and its local legitimacy. Although the tensions exacerbated the fragility of the state, the events that unfolded from the late 1990s were as much a consequence of this underlying fragility as a source of it. The centralised state inherited from Britain at independence in 1978 has struggled to consolidate in the Solomon Islands’ fragmented social environment and challenging geography. With around eighty languages spoken among just over half a million people dispersed across the archipelago, the Solomon Islands remains one of the most socially and linguistically diverse countries in the world. Individual identities and allegiances remain relentlessly localised, with little sense of ‘nation’ or shared political community. Former Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni famously remarked that the Solomon Islands was “a nation conceived but never born”. Contemporary forms of ‘community’ for the 85 per cent of Solomon Islanders living in rural areas revolve around complex interplays of kinship and exchange relations, friendships, church membership and myriad claims to customary land. Most people continue to live on the margins of the modern state and formal economy, relying on local systems of informal or customary governance for their welfare and security needs, and on a mix of subsistence agriculture and cash cropping for everyday survival.

The centralisation of political power continues to be contested in many places, as it was during colonial times. Much of this contestation has revolved around the allocation of scarce public resources, the unfulfilled

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promises and uneven patterns of post-independence development, and the failure of successive governments to deliver essential services such as education and health. The Solomon Islands’ emergent political culture shares important characteristics with its nearest Melanesian neighbours. The strong political party system on which the Westminster system is premised has failed to take root and a highly personalised style of ‘big-man’ politics prevails. Accessing and redistributing state funds through patronage networks based on kinship has become a key dynamic of political behaviour and has contributed to endemic instability and corruption, accentuated by a corrosive nexus between elements of the political elite and the Asian-dominated logging industry.\footnote{Sinclair Dinnen, ‘The Solomon Islands Intervention and the Instabilities of the Post-Colonial State’, Global Change, Peace and Security, vol. 20, no. 3 (October 2008), pp. 339-55.} As well as undermining bureaucratic service delivery, this style of politics has consistently reinforced localism at the expense of nation-building.

The small formal economy—logging, fishing and, increasingly, mining—has failed to match the expectations of a rapidly growing and youthful population. Spatial inequalities associated with longstanding patterns of uneven development have encouraged internal migration from less developed regions to areas with better employment prospects and access to services. Migration from densely populated Malaita to Honiara and adjacent areas in northern Guadalcanal has also accentuated social and cultural differences between settlers and indigenous landowners. Local resentments have been directed at the perceived monopolisation of employment and economic opportunities by Malaitans, and their involvement in land transactions viewed as contrary to Guadalcanal customs.\footnote{Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, ‘Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal crisis in the Solomon Islands’, Working Paper 01/01 (Canberra: State Society and Governance in Melanesia Project, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2001).} This sense of grievance was most acutely felt by those in the remote and undeveloped southern Weather Coast, where the rebellion that heralded the tension originated.

Dissatisfaction with the centralised system of government, and demands for greater political devolution and provincial autonomy, have by no means been confined to Guadalcanal. Perceptions of a progressive withdrawal of government from the island provinces and a widening gap between Honiara—where political and economic power is concentrated—and the rest of the country are shared by many Solomon Islanders. The dissolution of Area Councils from the mid-1990s onwards saw the demise of an important mechanism for the delivery of government services and public works at local levels.\footnote{Sinclair Dinnen and Matthew Allen, ‘Paradoxes of Postcolonial Police-building’, Policing and Society: An International Journal of Research and Police, DOI:10.1080/10439463.2012.696643 (2012), pp. 4-6.} A related aspect of these popular grievances concerns the perceived failure of the formal sector of government to engage with the local
systems and traditional leadership structures that provide for community-level governance across the archipelago. While under enormous stress in many places owing to the pace of change, these local systems based on a blending of custom, Christianity and tenuous linkages with bits of state, retain high levels of legitimacy among rural Solomon Islanders. Discontent with the central government has led to an intentional disengagement in some localities. In most cases, however, it has resulted in increasingly strident calls for a more engaged and devolved system of government with linkages to existing community governance structures, including traditional authorities as these have evolved.

The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

Australian leadership of the regional mission was contingent on securing the approval of the Solomon Islands authorities and Pacific Islands Forum member states. Forum Foreign Ministers subsequently endorsed the intervention plan, while the Solomon Islands Parliament passed the Facilitation of International Assistance (FIA) Act 2003, setting out the powers and immunities of mission personnel. Described as a “co-operative intervention”, RAMSI operates through the Solomon Islands' national laws. The mission is reviewed annually by the Solomon Islands Parliament which can, in theory, bring it to an end by revoking consent.

The wide-ranging mandate combines security and development objectives:

- Ensuring the safety and security of the Solomon Islands;
- Repairing and reforming the machinery of government, improving government accountability and the delivery of services in urban and provincial areas;
- Improving economic governance and strengthening government’s financial systems;
- Helping rebuild the economy and encouraging sustainable broad-based growth; and
- Building strong and peaceful communities.¹⁷

RAMSI’s initial phase, led by the PPF, focused on the restoration of law and order. This was to be followed by consolidation and institutional reform, and, finally, the building of sustainability and self-sufficiency among the Solomon Islands’ institutions. In addition to police and military personnel, civilians—

¹⁷ As listed on the RAMSI website: <http://www.ramsi.org/about/what-is-ramsi.html>.
many of them seconded Australian public servants\textsuperscript{18}—were placed as advisers or ‘in-line’ officials in various government departments. RAMSI has been described as “the most comprehensive whole of government strategy towards a fragile state of any donor to date.”\textsuperscript{19} The time commitment was also relatively open-ended, with no fixed exit date. Coordination is provided by a Special Coordinator’s Office in Honiara, while Australian-based agencies operate through an interdepartmental committee in Canberra.

Security was restored quickly and peacefully. Large numbers of firearms were surrendered, while well-known militant leaders were apprehended to be processed subsequently through the criminal courts. In addition to their executive policing role, the PPF began the longer-term task of cleaning up the RSIPF. Over 400 officers resigned or were removed, amounting to more than one quarter of the total workforce. Other early achievements included restoring stability to government finances. Improvements in public financial management and tax collection saw government revenues increase by around 170 per cent during RAMSI’s first three years.\textsuperscript{20} Legislative and policy provisions were enacted to support private sector investment.

Inevitably, there were also setbacks. Serious public disturbances occurred in Honiara in April 2006 following national elections.\textsuperscript{21} Two days of rioting and opportunistic looting destroyed much of the capital’s Chinatown and served to highlight the underlying fragility of the peace. Manasseh Sogavare’s subsequent election as Prime Minister heralded a dramatic deterioration in bilateral relations between the Solomon Islands’ and Australian governments. Sogavare sought to reassert control over RAMSI and curb what he viewed as Australia’s dominating role. This, in turn, provoked strong opposition from political leaders in Canberra.\textsuperscript{22} Changes of government in each country in late 2007 led to a welcome improvement in bilateral relations. RAMSI’s capacity to learn has been most evident during this later period.\textsuperscript{23} Set against earlier criticisms of Australian dominance, more space has opened for local and regional actors to participate in the shaping and implementation of the mission since 2007.

\textsuperscript{18} Australian Government departments participating in RAMSI included: the Departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Foreign Affairs and Trade, AusAID, Defence, Australian Federal Police, Attorney-General’s, Customs, Treasury, and Finance and Administration.


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., pp. 17-26.

\textsuperscript{23} John Braithwaite, Sinclair Dinnen, Matthew Allen, Valerie Braithwaite, and Hilary Charlesworth, Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), pp. 156-62.
New consultative arrangements included the 2009 Solomon Islands-Australia Partnership for Development that sought closer collaboration between the two governments in meeting common development goals. A Pacific Islands Forum Ministerial Standing Committee (FMSC) was also established, as was a ‘triumvirate group’ comprising senior officials from the Solomon Islands Government, the Forum and RAMSI, while a Partnership Framework was designed to increase alignment between the mission’s work and the priorities of SIG. These mechanisms reflected a growing sensibility to local concerns and priorities that had previously been overlooked. The early emphasis on law enforcement was progressively broadened through support for locally-led reconciliation processes, including the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2009. There has also been a lessening in the mission’s initial reluctance to facilitate national dialogue around political decentralisation.

Transition and Beyond—The Solomon Islands’ Future Prospects

As it moves into its tenth year, RAMSI continues to enjoy high levels of popular support, as demonstrated in the annual People’s Surveys. In the 2011 Survey, 86 per cent of respondents supported RAMSI’s continuing presence. Although uneven, there have been improvements in government service delivery. A substantial amount of public debt has been retired, while the formal economy has been growing, with GDP growth averaging around 7 per cent since 2004. Rumours of renewed ethnic tensions in early 2012 were unequivocally dismissed by spokespersons for the two former militias. The RSIPF successfully managed protests associated with latest change of government in November 2011, while reported incidents of serious crime remain low by regional and international standards.

While an indicator of success, popular support for RAMSI also suggests continuing lack of confidence in the Solomon Islands own institutions and anxiety about a possible return to conflict should the mission depart too early. Indeed, 65 per cent of respondents in the 2011 People’s Survey stated that the country was not yet ready for RAMSI to scale back its activities. Ironically, the success of the mission in restoring security and administrative functionality through its substantial engagement across all sectors of government may have inadvertently induced unhealthy levels of dependency and rendered RAMSI indispensable for the Solomon Islands’ continuing stability. This dependency is evident in different parts of the government

24 The People’s Surveys, commissioned by RAMSI and undertaken by the Australian National University, have been gauging local views across the Solomon Islands since 2006 on a range of social, economic and development issues. Accessible via the RAMSI website: <http://www.ramsi.org/>
system, as well as ranging from the highest levels of political leadership to ordinary citizens. This in turn raises questions about the effectiveness of RAMSI’s efforts to rebuild self-sufficiency and empower Solomon Islanders to resume control over their own destiny, as specified in the objectives for its final phase.

The mission’s extensive police-building engagement illustrates these dilemmas, some of which are common to all large interventions. Despite signs of improvement, the People’s Surveys reveal that Solomon Islanders still have limited confidence in the capabilities of their own police force. While in part a legacy of the earlier tensions, there is evidence that Solomon Islanders are now evaluating the local force in relation to the much better resourced and highly professional mission police. The poorly equipped RSIPF inevitably come off worse in such comparisons. An irony here is that the continuing presence of the PPF, whose primary task is to rebuild the local police, may actually be reinforcing this lack of confidence on the part of many citizens. RAMSI also provides two-thirds of the total costs of policing in the Solomon Islands, around double the amount provided by the government. At the same time, the Solomon Islands Government allocations to the police have been either flat or declining in real terms, raising obvious concerns around sustainability.

With much of RAMSI’s development work concentrated on central government agencies in Honiara, many rural Solomon Islanders still face major problems of access to state services. This includes access to the RSIPF and the state justice system. Significant inequities also exist in the distribution of police personnel and other assets in different parts of the country. For example, just over half the total number of RSIPF is stationed in Honiara, which is home to less than 20 per cent of the total Solomon Islands population. By contrast, only 7.5 per cent of the police are located in Malaita province, with around 30.3 per cent of the national population. It is only recently that more attention has been given to the development of a policing model that will be able to extend the reach of the RSIPF across the archipelago and that will also be sustainable in light of the fiscal constraints of the Solomon Islands Government.

RAMSI has been sensitive to local concerns about the potentially destabilising effects of its drawdown and eventual departure. The current Partnership Framework provides the master transitional strategy and the mission’s drawdown is calibrated according to the completion of agreed objectives rather than being bound by strict timelines. It is clear that some form of external security guarantee will be required for the foreseeable future. While the PPF have been withdrawing from the provinces since August 2011, Australian support to the RSIPF will continue for at least the

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27 The following discussion draws on Dinnen and Allen, ‘Paradoxes of Postcolonial Police-building’.
next four years, possibly longer. On the other hand, the small military component is likely to be withdrawn completely by the second half of 2013. Other development programs are likely to be absorbed into long-term development assistance provided by a range of bilateral and multilateral partners, including Australia.

Continuing international support is also premised on a growing appreciation of the structural challenges facing the Solomon Islands, including its relatively poor economic prospects, and the conflict stresses these might induce. Many of the underlying factors that contributed indirectly to the original tension remain unaddressed. These include local grievances associated with uneven development, limited economic opportunities for the rapidly growing population and the inadequate provision of government services in rural areas. Analysis by the World Bank demonstrates how economic growth since 2003 has been largely driven by the influx of aid post-2003 and a boom in unsustainable levels of logging. Set against a population growth rate of around 2.6 per cent, even these post-RAMSI economic growth rates have been unable to bring incomes back to pre-tension levels. According to recent forecasts, commercial logging stocks are expected to be exhausted by 2015, leading to a dramatic drop in government revenues. Planned new projects in fisheries, mining, tourism and agriculture, even if successful, are unlikely to make up for the shortfall. In addition, the demise of the notoriously corrupt logging industry is likely to place pressure on local patronage networks and exacerbate socioeconomic grievances, thereby partly recreating conditions that contributed to the original outbreak of violence in the late 1990s.

Despite the mission’s considerable achievements, the Solomon Islands remain vulnerable to future instability. Projections indicate that likely medium-term economic growth will increasingly be concentrated around Honiara and around enclave natural resource projects, especially mining. This is likely to accentuate historical patterns of uneven development and associated grievances over relative deprivation. Rapid and unplanned urban growth, typically involving informal settlements on customary or state land, has considerable potential for generating conflict over land use, as well as entrenching real and perceived inequalities in the distribution of incomes and services. As experience in neighbouring Papua New Guinea attests, strong linkages exist between enclave development and new patterns of rent-seeking and local conflict. The outstanding challenge is thus how to sustain RAMSI’s achievements in the years ahead. This is now well understood among senior mission officials, as it has been by Solomon Islanders for many years. It is also acknowledged in the fact that while RAMSI will eventually disappear, external assistance will continue, albeit in the form of

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substantial aid programs provided by Australia and other international partners.

The likely constraints on the Solomon Islands’ future growth prospects provides the context for increasing calls for Australia to open up its labour markets to temporary labour migration schemes from the islands.\textsuperscript{30} For young Solomon Islanders this would provide an opportunity to earn an income, while acquiring new skills and expanding personal horizons. As well as a source of remittances, such a scheme could contribute to domestic stability by providing a much needed safety valve in the face of the growing constituency of unemployed youth. Longer-term peace-building and nation-building agendas will require a much closer focus on strengthening the social contract between the Solomon Islands state and its citizens. This will require a move away from the Honiara-focus of much of the mission's activities to date. Set against the longstanding grievances with the organisation and effectiveness of the state system in the Solomon Islands, it is clear that simply re-building the same state structures that ostensibly collapsed during the tension is not a viable option. Difficult issues of political decentralisation and provincial autonomy need to be prioritised, as do those of developing linkages between the rural communities where most people live and the larger government system. This includes attention being given to the interface between government and the plethora of community governance systems at the most local levels. Some clues as to how this might take practical effect in the area of policing and justice are provided by the modest but innovative Community Officer scheme initiated by the RSIPF, with support from RAMSI.\textsuperscript{31}

RAMSI's presence has undoubtedly provided stability to the Solomon Islands following the turbulent events of the recent past. Maintaining and building on this stability as the mission gradually withdraws requires strong leadership and vision on the part of Solomon Islanders. The challenges facing this small Pacific island nation in an increasingly volatile global economy are daunting, and substantial support from bilateral and multilateral donors will be needed for many years to come. In terms of the mission’s evolution over the past decade, we are now witnessing a welcome return of a more ‘particularist and developmental lens’ in viewing the Solomon Islands longer-term challenges, as the post-conflict stabilisation focus gives way to a more ‘normal’ development assistance environment.

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\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., pp. 11-13.
An Increased Spotlight: Australia in Timor-Leste

Gordon Peake

With the departure of United Nations peacekeepers, Australia becomes the largest international presence in Timor-Leste. It does so at not necessarily an easy time: despite the stark development challenges that remain, the government in Dili is tired of outside advice. Australia's past actions over oil and gas in the Timor Sea still cast a shadow over the present. Although Australian aid in Timor-Leste is wide and varied, drawing broad conclusions about its effectiveness and impact is difficult owing to the relative absence of independent evaluations of these programs. Decisions made by each country's leaders can impact detectably upon the bilateral relationship and complicate the work of Australian government personnel in Dili.

After five missions and thirteen years, 2012 was the year in which United Nations (UN) peacekeepers finally packed up and left Timor-Leste. Three rounds of elections were successfully conducted and the Timorese police force, whose reform was the major focus of the last peacekeeping mission, is, according to the judgement of the UN, capable of discharging their own responsibilities.

The conclusion of the UN peacekeeping mission, which had a large development cooperation component, means that Australia is now the largest international presence in Timor-Leste. Australia assumes the mantle as Timor-Leste's largest aid donor at a time when, paradoxically, the leadership in the island nation seems to think it is in less urgent need of international assistance. Riding on top of revenue rolling in from oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea, Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao's coalition government strikes a profoundly nationalistic tone, rhetorically eschewing international assistance in favour of a more go-it-alone strategy. By way of example, the government politely but firmly declined the option of a follow-on UN mission, meaning that, for the first time in nearly fifteen years, Timor-Leste will no longer be a country considered in the UN Security Council.¹ This approach—that Timor-Leste's problems are Timor-Leste's to resolve—is echoed by the country's new President, Taur Matan Ruak, a straight-talking former chief of the army who does not stint from pointing out the challenges faced by Timorese leaders.

This article is divided into four sections. The first begins by examining the ghosts of the past. In a country where, even more than most, history is part of the fabric of the politics of the present, Australia’s past engagements in and over the territory taint efforts in the here and now. The ongoing wrangle over resource fields in the Timor Sea, which forms part of this history, complicates matters still further. The second section sketches the current politico-economic context and suggests that it is not a particularly amenable one for a donor such as Australia to be operating in. After nearly a decade and a half of sustained international assistance, the Timorese have had their fill of donors and, brimming with the confidence that money brings, are determined to go it alone as much as possible. In recent years, the government has unabashedly ripped into foreign organisations, particularly the UN. The third section examines Australia’s aid contribution against the backdrop of the Timorese Government receiving increased revenues, but still facing urgent development challenges. Assessing the effective impact of that contribution is relatively difficult given that by no means all of Australia’s programs have been independently evaluated. The fourth and final section shows that, generally speaking, there is relative lack of interest in Canberra in terms of goings on in their northern neighbour. In some ways this is a back-handed compliment: previously, Timor-Leste tended to only garner attention when things went wrong, or when it becomes a factor in domestic Australian politics, as it did when it was mooted as the potential location for an asylum processing centre.

### Arafura Ghosts

As Australian officials in Dili are sometimes pointedly reminded, their country has form in Timor-Leste. Perhaps the most undisguised instance of how the past rankles and still impacts the present came in early 2010, during the Timor-Leste and Development Partners Meeting, an annual donor conference held in the capital. The tone of these meetings is, for the most part, earnest and bureaucratic with donor speeches lauding prior achievements and Timorese government representatives presenting equally rosy accounts of unalloyed progress. Few Australian representatives at the 2010 conference are ever likely to forget the tirade delivered by the Timor-Leste Prime Minister, Xanana Gusmao. He used the opportunity to flay Australia for being responsible for the deaths of up to 60,000 Timorese during the Second World War, looking the other way during the Indonesian invasion of his country and then “adding insult to injury” by concluding an agreement with Indonesia to share wealth from the Timor Sea. Although it was new to many in the audience, this was not a one-off spray. During a nationwide tour in the previous months where the Prime Minister was touting his twenty-year development plan, he made repeated comments about Australia’s past behaviour. The Australian Government did not respond

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publicly to this raft of allegations. Gusmao seems to have calculated that Australia will not kick up a fuss and bite back. Timorese aggressiveness towards Australia is in marked contrast to the much more deferential political stance to Indonesia, for instance.

With regard to the Second World War, there seems some consensus that Gusmao’s history lesson is grounded in bitter truth. Historians argue that the arrival of Australian commandoes in neutral Portuguese Timor during the early 1940s served not to becalm a situation but to incite one.\(^3\) The arrival of Australian diggers in Dili is considered to have been a trigger for the subsequent Japanese invasion. When Australian troops withdrew, many of the Timorese who provided them material support were on the receiving end of brutal treatment. Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) planes carpet bombed Dili just before the war ended, leaving only a handful of buildings still standing.

Following the armistice with Japan, Australian engagement was relatively slight. A consulate opened shortly after the armistice but was closed down only a few years later in a round of budgetary cuts.\(^4\) The Portuguese colony would receive comparatively little attention from Canberra over the next thirty years. The majority of Australians who visited were either honeymooning couples from the Northern Territory or, in the sixties and seventies, hippies looking for one last adventure before returning home (Nobel Peace Prize winner and former President Jose Ramos-Horta has claimed that he perfected his English by selling picture postcards and other trinkets to these young visitors during the late 1960s). These travellers caused so much consternation among the Portuguese colonial authorities that an official travelled to Darwin to warn that no more “counter-culture” Australians were welcome in Dili.\(^5\)

However, it is Australia’s actions (or, as accurately, inactions) during 1974 and 1975 which reverberate decades on. In the context of a chaotic Portuguese decolonisation and violent divisions among Timorese parties as to the future direction of the territory, representatives of the Frente Revolucionária do Timor-Leste Independente (FRETILIN) declared independence from Portugal in November 1975. Timorese self-government was short-lived, as Indonesian forces invaded just nine days later. To all intents and purposes, Australia looked the other way when Indonesia was preparing to invade and was the only country to officially recognise Indonesia’s annexure of Timor-Leste during the occupation years. In the late 1980s, Australia agreed on a deal to share oil and gas revenues in the Timor Sea. In a now infamous picture, Gareth Evans and Ali Alatas, the foreign

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ministers of Australia and Indonesia flew over the Timor Sea in a
government jet to toast the deal. The photo of the two sharing a celebratory
drink in the plane is used regularly in the Timorese media to poke Australian
government representatives about an incident in the past it would prefer to
forget.6 One senior official in Dili interviewed likened Australia's aid and
development efforts since 1999 as trying to erase the “original sin” of that
recognition.7

To be sure, Australia has been among the most active of all countries
involved in Timor-Leste. An Australian-led International Force for East Timor
(INTERFET) restored basic security in the aftermath of the Timorese vote for
independence in 1999 and Australia was a key actor in subsequent
development and reconstruction efforts. Following a major security crisis in
2006, wherein large parts of the police and military in Dili unravelled and
more than 150,000 Timorese were driven from their homes, Australia
deployed, in cooperation with New Zealand, an International Stabilisation
Force to contain and manage the violence, peacekeepers that will also leave
this year.

Yet, in a place where history weighs heavily on today’s political discourse,
past actions still reverberate. The photo of the two foreign ministers clinking
glasses is every bit, if not more, prominent a picture as one of an INTERFET
patrol. Negotiations between Canberra and Dili over oil and gas following
Timor-Leste’s return from the graveyard of nations have been acrimonious.
Australian refusal to allow the International Court of Justice to deliberate on
the maritime boundary issue rankled especially and, although a treaty was
concluded in 2005, the subject of oil and gas remains a major sore point
between the two countries, albeit one that figures much more in political
rhetoric in Dili than Canberra.

The root of much of the last rancour is a dispute over how to develop the
Greater Sunrise gas field that sits in jointly-managed Australian-Timorese
waters. The operating company Woodside has stated that a floating
platform would be the most profitable option, but Gusmao's government
rejects this on the grounds that, if Darwin already has a pipeline from the
other shared field, Bayu-Undan, then Timor should have this one. The
Timorese Government refuses to approve any development that does not
include a pipeline to Timor-Leste, thus potentially derailing the entire project.
If a development plan is not approved by early 2013, either country can
terminate the existing arrangements, with implications for Timor-Leste,
Australia and Woodside, the operator of the field. In the months after the
election, the Timorese Government position would seem to have hardened

6 For a detailed account of this period see Paul Cleary, Shakedown: Australia’s Grab for Timor
Oil (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2007).
7 Comments by senior Australian diplomat, Dili, 7 May 2009 in course of interviews for Elisabeth
Lothe and Gordon Peake, ‘Addressing Symptoms but not Causes: Stabilisation and
further still. In a current affairs documentary aired by the ABC, the Prime Minister, senior ministers and a prominent government adviser accused the resource companies of underpaying taxes and categorically rejecting any proposal other than the floating pipeline option.\(^8\)

For the Timorese Government, there is big money at play here. The amount they allege is owed in back taxes, for instance, exceeds the total amount currently given in foreign development assistance per annum. This standoff over the oil and gas fields complicates Australia’s development efforts.

**The Boom in Dili and the Implications for Australia**

Australia may be the largest donor in Timor-Leste but its contribution is dwarfed in relative terms by the size of the budgets at the disposal of the government in Dili. AusAID’s annual budget for programming in Timor-Leste in 2012 is A$78.3 million; by comparison, the Timorese Government’s 2012 budget is close to US$2 billion, over thirty times as much. The Australian aid program in Papua New Guinea may be in a similar position in being monetarily overshadowed by the resource rents now at the disposal of the government in Port Moresby.

The hustle and bustle of the capital is essentially funded out of revenues from the oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea. Nearly three-quarters of Timor-Leste’s Gross National Income comes from oil and gas reserves located under the seabed between its southern coast and Australia.

The Timorese Government has ambitious plans for the country. The goal of the government’s glossy Strategic Development Plan is to transform Timor-Leste into an upper-middle income country in less than twenty years. There are plans for seven universities, high-speed internet throughout a land that currently has intermittent electricity, food supply exceeding demand, a universal social security system, an extensive network of land and marine national parks, a national ring-road and a law regulating almost every conceivable practice and behaviour. National self-confidence is high with the Finance Minister, Emilia Pires, likening the tiny nation to an Asian economic powerhouse. A few years ago, she told the travel and lifestyle magazine *Monocle*, “If the first decade of the 21st century was dominated by China then I feel the second decade will be for Timor-Leste”.\(^9\)

Money in the bank brings self-confidence and reluctance to be advised by others, particularly when that advice may be construed as being contrary or changing the government’s direction. The Prime Minister regularly invokes the slogan “*ita mos bele*”, (we also can) as a way of indicating self-reliance.

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Within the context of more than 400 years of colonialism, occupation and after more than a decade of international advice, the simple fact is that the Timorese Government feels it is time to run its own affairs, unencumbered by foreigners poking their noses around and venturing opinions. This is not necessarily an amenable environment for an aid program. The government’s approach may also be seen also as a belated reaction to top-down approach of the international presence over the years, particularly in the early part of the last decade.  

To the contrary, as a range of international organisations and donors have found, especially over the last five years, Timor-Leste can be at times a downright unreceptive place. In recent years, the Timorese Government has resisted perceived outside criticism in extremely adamant and belligerent terms. Government press releases trenchantly refute commentary, reports and opinions of foreign individuals and organisations about development challenges in Timor-Leste. In 2011, for example, the government went from being privately dismissive about the UN peacekeeping mission to outright condemning it. Government opprobrium rained down on the UN following the leak of a draft power point slide that seemed to suggest that the Prime Minister was expanding his powers at the expense of other institutions. The Prime Minister publicly dressed down UN staff, accusing them of hoping for misery in the country in order to prolong their tenure. He also got stuck into the Timorese staff working for the UN and accused them of being afflicted with “mental colonialism”. In a memorable turn of phrase, the Secretary of State-Defence likened the UN to a “blind cow”. The incident is also worth recalling because of the eventual response of the UN. Even though the centralising tendencies of the Prime Minister had been referenced, albeit in more careful terms in previous UN reports, the mission leadership in Dili chose to apologise rather than take on the issue. Indeed, the reluctance of the UN to use what leverage it had in terms of questioning strategic and operational decisions made by the Timorese Government, or even to stand up for itself, has been a general feature of the current mission. Therefore, development donors dealing with a suddenly affluent government are in somewhat of a no-win situation. Foreigners are deemed unessential, but at the same time remain lightning rods for attention and opprobrium.

The government’s swollen coffers and optimistic rhetoric should also not obscure that more systemic and deep-seated challenges remain. Dili is a much more hopeful place today than the fearful shuttered city that it was less than five years ago. However, beyond the tarmac roads of the capital, many problems are manifest. According to UNICEF and the World Bank, child

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10 I thank the anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this article for this insight.  
12 Julio Tomas Pinto, ‘UNMIT Mission: Development or Destruction?’, Tempo Semanal, 7 June 2011.  

malnutrition rates in Timor-Leste are 54 per cent, one of the world’s highest.\textsuperscript{14} The country is reportedly on track to meet only a few of the Millennium Development Goals (the government disputes this). The IMF has warned about high levels of inflation. During past rainy seasons, many roads were impassable, despite sizable amounts of the government budget having been spent on improving infrastructure. A lot may have been done but there is much more still to do. The scale of these challenges was summarised in the address to new government ministers by Timorese President, Taur Matan Ruak. His words were unsparing, redolent of the words sometimes used behind closed doors by development donors but never publicly uttered for fear of causing offence. He told the new ministerial line-up:

\begin{quote}
We see very low levels of income, a fragile economic fabric, high external dependence, low levels of infrastructure, unbalanced regional development, with unruly urban growth and large differences among cities and with rural areas, low levels of wellbeing, a weak administrative structure and low technical and scientific development.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

It was a sobering statement, revealing of the development challenges that remain.

\textbf{The Practical Difficulty of Assessing Australia’s Aid Contribution}

Australia provides a wide and varied range of assistance to Timor-Leste. Programs in health, education, justice, governance, water and sanitation, agriculture, police and defence have been long running, some for nearly a decade. Endeavours to build roads and tackle the sky high rates of violence against women are scheduled to get underway in 2013. Most programs are implemented under the AusAID banner, except for policing and defence assistance, which is managed, respectively, by the Australian Federal Police and Australian Defence Force. Australia also provides substantial financial support to the development endeavours of the World Bank and various UN agencies, funds and programs working in Timor-Leste.

Whether these efforts are contributing to their intended goals is hard to know. Only a few of these programs appear to have been independently evaluated and so it is hard to derive definite judgements about their effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact.\textsuperscript{16} The last independent


\textsuperscript{16} The AusAID website is a relatively comprehensive source of background information, data and programmatic documentation. By comparison there is little more than a few sentences on
review of an Australian aid program in Timor-Leste to have made it to the AusAID website took place over three years ago. Alternate sources of data such as the occasional press release are not valid and verifiable evidence as to whether Australian programming is having its intended impact.

One element does seem clear. To make these programs work requires engagement from senior levels of the Timorese leadership, which has sometimes been lacking. The Timorese Government is adamant that it wants to pursue reform initiatives on its own terms and has often been cool on substantive political engagement with Australian aid programs. For example, the former Minister of Justice, Lucia Lobato, did not find time in her schedule to have a single meeting in the last two years of her tenure with the Australian Timor Justice Facility Program, even though that program was a $20 million plus investment into Timorese justice institutions. The new money has also made ministers and influential civil servants in the Timorese state less amenable to receiving outside advice. Complaints about government lack of interest are a regular refrain among advisers and aid workers based in Dili, including those funded by Australia. The accuracy of these trenchant snipes is hard to verify, all the more so because they are not relayed in official reports and commentary, but speak, in at least some way, to a generalised sense of frustration about the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of many aid endeavours, including those of Australia.

Because of the relative absence of independent assessment reports it is also hard to know the extent to which Australia construes its role as being to question the strategic and operational decisions of its Timorese Government partner. Although not alighting on Australia in particular, a number of Timorese NGOs have questioned whether the extensive training and capacity building endeavours of multilateral institutions and foreign donors have had any discernible difference in altering behaviour. For example, Australia contributed a significant amount of resources to the security forces over the last decade, but neither the national police nor the military appear to be epitomes of best-practice. This is despite the fact that, between 2008 and 2010 the budget of the approximately forty person Australian Federal Police Program was about the same as that of the entire 3000 plus member Timorese police force. There is also a trend of paramilitarism (with a marked fetish towards heavy weapons), convoluted and confusing legislation, impunity, heavy-handed approaches to public order and a marked lack of accountability amongst the Timorese police. These effects have been exacerbated by the fact that Timorese authorities seem reluctant the police and military assistance programs, implemented by the Australian Federal Police and Australian Defence Force respectively, on each organisation’s website.

An Increased Spotlight: Australia in Timor-Leste

to sanction their officers. Since the police force was formed in 2000, just a handful of internal investigation cases have resulted in dismissals. With the UN police readying to leave after the election, the Timorese police ordered ten armoured tanks of questionable practicality. Given the lamentable state of the roads, it is doubtful whether any of these vehicles will be able to traverse anywhere but a few boulevards in Dili. The army, although having been restored to pre-2006 crisis operating standards seems still to be struggling for a role, and equally preoccupied with buying showy but impractical kit, such as helicopters.

Going by the descriptions of the programs that are available, many Australian programs concentrate on building the individual and institutional capacity of civil servants and their ministries and agencies. This more technical-focused and non-concrete form of aid assistance competes with the free-and-easy quality of aid from other donors, most particularly China. Whereas Australian aid has for the most part consisted of delivering relatively intangible capacity building (which, by its very nature, is a tacit reproach of the current means of doing business), other donors’ contributions are more visible and come, ostensibly, unconditionally. For example, China has built grandiose ministries and the garish new presidential palace in Dili, leading observers to speculate on ulterior motives, and the implications for Timor-Leste’s relations with its neighbours, including Australia.

No News is Good News?

Many Australians have some connection with Timor-Leste. Dedicated advocacy over many years by Australians is, among other elements, credited with causing a reversal in official Australian Government positions. Large numbers of friendship groups forge people-to-people connections between Australian and Timorese towns and there are almost weekly reports

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18 The reports of Timorese NGO Fundasaun Mahein (Guardian Foundation) which monitors the security sector are available at <www.fundasaunmahein.org> (Most reports are in Tetun with English summaries).
19 Many of the Timorese police named in the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry into the crisis of 2006 remain in their jobs. In late 2010, the government decided to ‘certify’ all officers with outstanding allegations against them, including murder and serious assault. This made a mockery of the original intention of the certification process, which was to restore the credibility of the Timorese police after its collapse in 2006. The decision brought opprobrium from the UN Secretary-General and member states, but had little impact on the ground. Notwithstanding the cases already dismissed, there are over 1425 disciplinary cases—an average of one for every 2.5 police officers—still to be addressed.
of goodwill visits being undertaken by Australians. Timor-Leste is also being marketed as a destination for tourists and travellers.

Attention from senior members in the Australian Government about goings on in Timor-Leste is, for the most part, relatively slight. Like many countries in Australia’s near abroad, Timor-Leste tends to attract interest from the highest political echelons in Canberra when something goes wrong, such as it did during the 2006 crisis or 2008 assassination attempts on the President and Prime Minister, in which cases Australia responds rapidly. At other times, there is little attention and ministerial visits from Canberra tend to be relatively pro-forma. When Timor-Leste does figure in terms of Australian diplomacy it is as backdrop for wider Australian foreign policy interests. Ministers extolled frequently the contributions of Australia in the country’s campaign for membership of the Security Council, while pictures of Timor-Leste featured prominently in the glossy brochures and reports accompanying the bid.

One interpretation of this relative absence of attention is a positive one: the relationship between the two countries is normalising. However, the only occasion when Timor-Leste did enter the Australian political consciousness since the assassination attempts against the country’s leaders in 2008 would suggest that the Australian Government does not view its relationship with its near neighbour in entirely ‘normal’ terms. Less than two months prior to 2010 parliamentary elections, and shortly after acceding to the premiership, Prime Minister Gillard floated a proposal to house asylum seekers in Timor-Leste. The announcement came as a surprise: her only contact with Timorese authorities on the plan prior to the announcement consisted of one phone call with President Jose Ramos Horta. There did not seem to have been any consultation with relevant departments or calculation as to how the proposal would impact on Australia’s diverse aid programs in Timor-Leste. Opposition politicians in Canberra decried the announcement as a pre-election gimmick and exemplar of the new leader’s bumbling diplomacy. Constitutionally speaking, Ramos-Horta was not even the correct person.

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21 The East Timor Action Network (ETAN) website, a repository of all reports in English related to Timor-Leste, regularly reference local Australian newspaper reports of good works undertaken by Australians in Timor-Leste.

22 Sometimes these rapid responses are more useful in terms of political symbolism than practical effect. For example, in the wake of the 2008 assassination attempts, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd dispatched an additional team of seventy Australian Federal Police officers to Dili. Uncertainty over their legal status prevented them operating in country immediately following arrival. Although Australian and Timorese authorities eventually reached a resolution on this issue, the officers were never deployed in any capacity. After spending a few months idling around an Australian army base and the coffee shops of Dili, they were withdrawn.

23 See for example, Partnering for Peace: Australia’s Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding Experiences in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea and in Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste (Canberra: Australian Civil-Military Centre for Excellence, 2012). For a critical perspective see Jeni Whalan, ‘Good to Have a Seat at the Table’, Canberra Times, 20 October 2012.
who Prime Minister Gillard should have called. The proposal was also condemned in unequivocal terms by the legislature in Dili; parliamentarians of all stripes grumbled that Australia was quite happy to propose Timor-Leste as a centre for processing refugees, but not oil and gas. After nearly a year of fitful negotiations, the proposal was quietly dropped. The whole incident appeared to capture the sense that senior members of the Australian Government seem to view Timor-Leste as either a dumping ground for its problems, or as a friendly state that would readily accede to its requests. A self-confident Timorese Government would probably shrink back from either characterisation.

Conclusion

Australia’s entangled historical relationship with its near neighbour is made all the more mercurial by occasional politicking for domestic audiences in both countries. A combination of a complicated history and a present context where the Timorese officials appear ostensibly resistant to advice creates a tricky environment for Australia to achieve its stated development aims.

In all likelihood, Canberra will continue to loom larger in rhetoric from Dili than the other way around. Timor-Leste is, for the most part, not a country high on Australia’s watch-list. The UN’s departure in and of itself is unlikely to change that. However, the absence of the UN peacekeepers does mean that Australia’s aid contribution is now much more prominent than before. Add the ever-emotive issue of oil and gas into the field and the potential for a more trying assignment for Australian diplomats and aid bureaucrats over the term of this government than perhaps officials faced during the tenure of the last.

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Fiji: Fishing in Troubled Waters

Brij V. Lal

Fiji’s military coup in 2006 was the fourth since 1987 and has spelled predictable disaster for the island nation. While Commodore Frank Bainimarama was able to assert a semblance of his authority on the country through media censorship, physical harassment of dissidents and a plethora of draconian decrees restricting, he found it rather more difficult to convince the international community of his noble intentions for the country. The Fiji regime then sought to fragment regional solidarity and cultivate diplomatic relations with far-flung counties such as Brazil, South Africa, Iran and North Korea in a vain effort to create an impression of gathering diplomatic support for itself. There was much movement but little change.

Fiji’s military regime has had a hard time convincing its neighbours and the international community about its noble intentions to draw the curtain on the country’s troubled past and to launch it into a new era of truly democratic and race-free politics based on: “one country, one nation, one people”. A large part of the problem unfortunately is the regime’s own record of broken promises. Combating corruption was the initial reason given for the coup, but it is as rife now as it ever was. No one seriously believes that transparency characterises the conduct of public affairs. Ministerial salaries remain secret, and hand-picked consultants get government contracts. Nearly half the country lives on or below the poverty line and nearly twenty per cent of the population resides in the country’s mushrooming squatter settlements. The once robust sugar industry is dying a visible death, affecting the lives of over 100,000 people. The country is still being run by a copious number of decrees, many of which are beyond the purview of the courts. Public discourse is hampered by fear of retribution. The press practises self-censorship as a survival strategy.

On the other side of the ledger, the regime has decreed measures which are promising. It has decreed a common name, ‘Fijian’, for all its citizens. Racial designations from school names have been outlawed. There has been a concerted effort to remove gender discrimination from existing legislation. Racially exclusive institutions have been put on notice. These are all positive developments, but even those who applaud these moves wish that their conception and implementation had been preceded by wider public consultation, which accounts for their lack of warm reception from the populace.

In the South Pacific region, Fiji’s reputation has suffered since Commodore Frank Bainimarama reneged on his promise, given at the Pacific Forum Leaders meeting in Nuku’alofa in March 2007, to hold elections in 2009 and return the country to full parliamentary democracy. The cost in the country’s credibility and standing has been enormous. Where Fiji was once the
acknowledged leader of the region and operated as its representative voice to the international community, it is now a pariah nation, expelled from the Forum and lectured to by smaller island states which once stood in Fiji’s very large shadow (Samoa, for instance). Leading the Forum’s chorus of disapproval about events in Fiji was the Suva-based Forum Secretariat, headed by Tuiloma Neroni Slade,\(^1\) citing in support of its stance the Biketawa Declaration. Adopted by the Forum in 2000, the Declaration bound the Forum countries to the principles of good governance, belief in individual rights under the rule of law regardless of race, gender, colour or creed, and, most relevant in this context, in upholding

democratic processes and institutions which reflect national and local circumstances, including the peaceful transfer of power, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government.\(^2\)

Fiji was a prominent signatory to the Declaration. The military regime in 2011 sought (unsuccessfully) to prevent the renewal of Slade’s contract for a further three years, supporting a rival candidate, former Fiji Foreign Minister Kaliopate Tavola, despite the protocol demanding that the host country not sponsor its own national for the job.

Fiji effectively sought to undermine the Forum by assisting in the birth of a rival lobby organisation, Pacific Small Islands Developing States (P-SIDS), a regional offshoot of a larger body by the same name formed in 1992 to address the concerns of small states facing the problems of remoteness, vulnerability to natural disasters, growing population and limited resources.\(^3\) P-SIDS met ahead of the Forum Leaders’ meetings, issued general support for the programs and policies of the Fijian regime, and asserted the sovereignty and independence of its members. It did so more for public consumption than in any realistic expectation of these being realised. Where it mattered most, they generally fell in line behind Australia and New Zealand. As the expression goes, the Pacific nations knew “which side of the bread was buttered”. This was nowhere better illustrated than at the Forum Leaders meeting in Rarotonga in August 2012, attended for the first time by the US Secretary of State. At a meeting in Nadi a week before the Rarotonga event, some Pacific Island countries, Kiribati and Nauru in particular, had spoken in favour of having Fiji return to full Forum membership. But New Zealand Prime Minister John Key ruled out any change in policy until after the elections in 2014, stating that:

\(^1\) From Samoa, Slade was the Secretary General of Forum Secretariat since 2008 who had served on the International Criminal Court from 2003-2006, and as Attorney General of Samoa from 1976-1982.


\(^3\) It is widely believed that one of the architects of the Pacific offshoot was Peter Thomson, Fiji’s Permanent Representative the United Nations.
We will obviously point out we really don’t think Fiji should be allowed back in the Forum in full until they actually have democratic elections and the military is back in the barracks.¹

There was no dissent from any of the Pacific island countries participating in the conference. As for P-SIDS, it will slide into oblivion once Fiji re-joins the Forum. Its only role at present is to be a thorn in the Forum’s side.

Fiji also sought to use the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) to press its case and to put pressure on the Forum. The MSG is an inter-governmental organisation of Melanesian states (Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, FLNKS (Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste) of New Caledonia and Fiji) formed in 1983. Fiji’s joining the organisation was opportunistic. Following the 1987 military coup, it sought support to soften regional and international pressure on Fiji but was otherwise a dormant member. Historically and culturally, Fiji and its leaders had aligned with their Polynesian neighbours. Many of Fiji’s traditional leaders had family ties with them. The MSG got embroiled in Fiji’s political discussions after its expulsion from the Pacific Islands Forum in 2009. Several meetings were held to discuss the Fiji situation, but nothing substantial came out of them because there was a deep division of opinion among Melanesian states about the events in Fiji. Some Melanesian leaders and intellectuals, in private correspondence, expressed sadness in having to publicly support Fiji when the military coup there had transgressed the fundamental values underpinning the overarching concept of the ‘Melanesian Way’,² which includes respect for traditional cultural values emphasising consensus and compromise. They felt that the MSG was being manipulated by Fiji for its own political agenda, used for purposes other than those its founding charter envisioned. Other Melanesian leaders supported Fiji as an act of disapproval of Australian attitudes and policies in the Pacific. It was one way for them to “get back” at Australia for its allegedly “high-handed” actions, including the pursuit of the Fiji-born former Attorney General of the Solomon Islands, Julian Moti, for sex offences.³ In a public lecture at The Australian National University in August 2012, the Solomon Islands Prime Minister, Gordon Darcy Lilo, emphasised the MSG’s economic role in fostering trading relationships among Melanesian states and said that political issues (such as the future of West Papua, and the political situation in Fiji) will receive their ‘proper’ share of attention at the appropriate time. But the MSG has not gone much beyond divided rhetorical support for Fiji, and there the matter is likely to remain.

² Generally understood to have as its principal advocate Papua New Guinea politician and philosopher Bernard Narakobi, one of the founders of the political party, The Melanesian Alliance. Narakobi famously asserted the concept involved the “total cosmic vision of life”.
³ Moti was extradited to Australia and tried in the courts though the overwhelming impression remains that this was a politically motivated action on the part of the Howard Government over Solomon Islands’ sometime defiant stance towards Australia.
Another foreign policy initiative of the Fiji regime was its much-trumpeted “Look North Policy” towards Asia, in particular towards China. China’s increased presence in the Pacific islands, its interest in their resources (fisheries and timber, and minerals such as manganese and bauxite) accompanied by aid and soft loans, is well known. After the 2006 coup, Chinese companies were given contracts for several infrastructure projects in Fiji and licences to mine bauxite.\(^7\) One Chinese official was quoted as saying that China valued Fiji as a “useful transition point and for its proximity to important shipping lane”, and as a “valuable destination for economic engagement but of marginal and possibly declining political utility”.\(^8\) Statements such as these have caused some concern in Washington and elsewhere. For its part, Fiji played the “China Card” to the hilt, hoping to get Washington to put pressure on Wellington and Canberra to soften their travel sanctions on Fiji. Whether this move on Fiji’s part will pay dividends is uncertain. However, in July both Australia and New Zealand relaxed their travel bans on Fiji and promised to assess visa application from people working for the regime on a “case-by-case” basis, which has been interpreted as a reward for the moves Fiji has made towards holding elections in Fiji in 2014. What role pressure from the United States played in this change of policy is not known. It is understood that Australia was less keen than New Zealand to adopt a more relaxed attitude and was prompted to act because of pressure from New Zealand. But Fijian officials are hoping for a full restoration of diplomatic relations following the appointment of new high commissioners. There is some apprehension in Fijian foreign policy circles about increased Chinese presence in Fiji, which they see as not being in the country’s long term interests.

Leaving China aside, Fiji has been busy opening embassies in distant parts of the world. Early in 2012, it opened embassies in South Africa and Brazil and in September in the United Arab Emirates. It also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Iran, and promised to establish diplomatic relations with North Korea. It is difficult to see what practical, tangible benefits Fiji will derive from these initiatives. Perhaps they are undertaken to remind Australia and New Zealand (and especially the people in Fiji) that while Fiji is being ostracised and punished by its big neighbours, countries in other parts of the world are only too ready and eager to engage with Fiji. Perhaps, by engaging with Iran and North Korea, Fiji hopes to again get Washington to put pressure on Australia and New Zealand to reassess their stance towards it. But these are short-sighted and eventually counterproductive diplomatic games Fiji is playing with no serious expectation of any far-reaching benefits. It is also understood that Israel is unhappy with Fiji’s engagement with Iran, and getting the powerful Israel lobby offside will be hugely detrimental to Fiji’s interests in the international

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\(^8\) Ibid., p. 381.
arena, especially its vain hope of getting a seat on the UN Security Council. It would be interesting to see if the international community would agree to see a friend of Iran and North Korea gaining a seat on the Security Council. Perhaps all these new initiatives will be allowed quietly to relapse once Fiji returns to parliamentary democracy, and once no benefits are seen to derive from them.

The European Union (EU) proved a ‘tough nut’ to crack for Fiji. Its representations for greater understanding of Fiji’s situation went unheeded, as the EU withheld its proposed fiscal package ($350 million) for the reform of the ailing sugar industry. For its part, the EU adhered strictly to the Cotonou Agreement, succeeding the 1976 Lome Convention, which defined the framework and the underpinning values of its program of cooperation with the developing countries of Africa, Caribbean and the Pacific. Among those values was “promoting human rights, democratic principles based on the rule of law and transparent and accountable governance”. A military coup overthrowing a democratically-elected government was manifestly in breach of them. Fiji’s sugar industry was the principal casualty of the EU’s position, but its steadfast defence of democratic values could not be faulted.

Fiji adopted a particularly belligerent attitude towards Australia and New Zealand after the 2006 coup, accusing these two countries of bullying tactics and of orchestrating regional and international opinion against Fiji. In November 2009, it expelled Australia’s High Commissioner to Fiji, James Batley, ironically at a time when relations between the two countries seemed to be on the mend. Australian aid to Fiji continued apace, but its travel ban on the Fiji military and supporters of the military regime remained. This was particularly irksome to some in the regime who had families and property in Australia or visited it for medical treatment. The Fiji regime’s supporters in Australia (including some academics and journalists) severely criticised the Australian Government for its stance towards Fiji, urging immediate, unconditional engagement. The risk of not doing so, they said, was “losing” the Pacific to China, assuming that the Pacific was Australia’s to lose in the first place. For its part, Australia demanded tangible proof of definite moves by Fiji to hold elections and restore the country to parliamentary democracy. Having seen Fiji renege on its promises in the past, there was understandable doubt about Fiji’s motives and modus operandi.

In early 2012, Fiji fulfilled its promise to appoint a Constitution Commission to re-write a new constitution for the country, under which elections would be held in 2014. Its chair is the widely respected Kenyan constitutional lawyer, Professor Yash Ghai, who accepted the appointment on the implicit understanding that decrees restricting the freedom of speech and assembly would be revoked, or at least relaxed to enable people to express their views to the Commission without fear of retribution from the authorities. Some restrictions were partially removed, but not enough to engender confidence in free public speech, certainly not enough to satisfy the major political
parties.\(^9\) The military regime has also insisted that a number of non-negotiable demands are included in the new constitution. The most troublesome is the demand for complete immunity for all those who had participated in the overthrow of the government in 2006. This was widely rejected by all the political parties, and even the Constitution Commission chair Professor Ghai thought that immunity should be considered as part of a wider process of “transitioning to democracy”, and arrived at through “public submissions and debate in the [Constituent] Assembly”. He went on to say that “retrospective immunity is most unusual, perhaps unique, and, we believe, undesirable”\(^10\). This puts the Commission at loggerheads with the military regime. Commodore Bainimarama lashed out at Ghai:

> What is happening is like a proverbial camel. They come in with their head into the tent and then their whole body comes in and they kick the owner out of the tent. That's what him and the other people they are listening to are trying to do.\(^11\)

How this difficult issue is finally resolved remains to be seen. There has to be closure at some point; no living organism can survive a prolonged period of festering ailment. But closure must be preceded by disclosure. It is a truism that those who refuse to face the truth of their past experience, in all its complexity and contradiction, are more than likely repeat the mistakes of the past.

The starting of the constitutional consultation process was enough for Australia and New Zealand to call for the restoration of full diplomatic relations with Fiji. This was trumpeted by the regime and its supporters as a major humiliating defeat for Australia and New Zealand and an unequivocal proof of the failure of their previous policy of non-engagement with Fiji. But the matter was not as simple as that. In truth, it was Fiji which had expelled the High Commissioners of these two countries in the first place, and by welcoming the resumption of full diplomatic relations, it was acknowledging that ruptured relations with its two dominant regional partners was not in its own best interests. The fully restored diplomatic relations will put the spotlight on Fiji once again. There will be greater scrutiny of its promises and policies: Fiji will be on notice again.

Particularly closely watched will be the process of drafting the new constitution and the holding of elections in 2014. Already, the battlelines are


drawn. The military regime hopes that the Commission will produce a constitution that enshrines its vision for the country which includes, among other things, a non-racial electoral system, with one person, one vote, one value, or what once used to be called "common roll". In contrast, most of the major political parties want the 1997 Constitution retained, with substantial amendments to the electoral system, replacing the Alternative Vote model with some form of Proportional Representation. They are open to the proposal for non-racialism in the electoral system, but one which is achieved gradually over a number of years. The appointment of a Constituent Assembly to deliberate on the new draft constitution is also a matter concern. At present the Prime Minister has complete say on the membership of the Assembly, with no provision for consultation with anyone. And he himself is likely to be a candidate in the forthcoming elections. There is also deep concern about what role the military will have in the new constitution. From time to time the military has claimed a watchful guardian role for itself, at odds with the conventional Westminster tradition, while many in Fiji want the military to retreat to the barracks and remain there. But the recent experience of developing countries is that once out of the barracks, the military does not voluntarily resume its traditional role.

So, as 2012 comes to an end, none of the fundamental questions facing Fiji have been resolved. A constitutional dialogue is under way but whether it will be allowed to reach fruition remains an open question. Fiji has been thrashing around in troubled waters seeking new friends in unfamiliar and unlikely places, with potentially disastrous consequences. At the end of it all, Fiji will have to acknowledge and reconcile with the irrefutable logic of its history and geography. And it will have to come to terms with its troubled past with sensitivity and understanding. Coercion as an instrument of public policy will always be ultimately counterproductive.

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Peace Education and Peace-building in the Solomon Islands: Disconnected Layers

Jack Maebuta

The notion of conflict, peace, education and development that characterise discussions about the Solomon Islands immediate past, present and future prospects are complex and interrelated. These terms are interrelated as conflict, peace and education affect development. Likewise, poor development can be one of the causes of conflict. Development as a multi-dimensional reality consists of interrelated issues such as the economy, health, education, social relations and governance. To this end, a macro-perspective of the relationship between conflict, peace, education and development is important, particularly in post-conflict reconstruction. In the Solomon Islands, conflict has not occurred in a vacuum. It has been strongly influenced by the turbulent socio-cultural variables of the country. Long-term peace-building efforts in the Solomon Islands ultimately depend on effectively reconnecting thinking and practice to conflict, peace, education and development.

In order to understand how peace can be achieved in conflict and post-conflict contexts, it is first necessary to understand the theoretical landscape within which peace education sits. The concept of peace education is defined within divergent contexts. However, by considering a number of theoretical parameters and approaches within the literature, it is possible to identify a consensus that peace education is primarily a matter of changing mindsets with the purpose of promoting understanding, respect and tolerance toward one’s enemies.¹ The lack of an integrated approach to peace education has necessitated the theorisation of the Integrated Theory of Peace (ITP) and the dissemination of the Integrated Theory of Peace Education (ITPE).² The ITP and ITPE are critical to understanding the disconnected layers between peace education and peace-building. While peace-building is difficult to define and even more difficult to achieve in practice,³ in the context of post-conflict reconstruction initiatives in the Solomon Islands, it is taken to refer to programs of action that aim to address the underlying issues in ethnic conflict and deal with post-conflict development challenges.

³ E.M. Cousens and C. Kumar (eds), Peacebuilding as Politics: Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2001).
Despite these divergent meanings and approaches, the common core to peace education and peace-building\(^4\) includes violence prevention, multicultural understanding, tolerance towards enemies and promotion of dignity and equality. These key elements add clarity to what constitutes peace education and peace-building in any context but, as Gavriel Salomon has stressed, not all programs are equal and able to be transferred from one country to another.\(^5\)

One of the key arguments in this article is that RAMSI in its transition phase needs to move beyond an emphasis on law and order to engage in culturally-appropriate deep intervention to deal with the underlying issues that caused the conflict, and that peace education is one tool that could help to achieve this.

**Background to the Ethnic Conflict**

The ethnic conflict in the Solomon Islands, locally referred to as ‘the ethnic tension’, began in 1998 when a group of militant youths—Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA), later renamed the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM)—from the island of Guadalcanal attacked settlements of islanders predominantly from Malaita (a neighbouring island) in northwest Guadalcanal. There are several historical factors that gave rise to the conflict. To begin with, there was an inequitable distribution of national wealth and financial resources during the colonial era. Most of the economic activities were on the island of Guadalcanal. As a result of illegal squatting on Guadalcanal local people felt that they were being culturally and economically marginalised in their own land. The non-Guadalcanal people were seen to have exploited economic opportunities such as jobs and services created by major investments on Guadalcanal. Resentment arising from these issues escalated over time, and in 1988 formed the basis of bona fide demands made by Guadalcanal Province to the government. However, the failure of the government to address these demands further aggravated their grievances, which resulted in violent conflict at the end of 1998.

**Peace-building Initiatives**

Between June 1999 and July 2003 a number of peace initiatives were undertaken to resolve the conflict. These included: a government-funded public reconciliation feast; a Commonwealth-initiated Honiara peace accord; the Buala peace accord; the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA); the Anglican Church of Melanesia’s peace negotiation; and the Australian Government-led multilateral Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI).


\(^5\) Ibid.
In 2000, the Australian and New Zealand governments assisted in negotiating ceasefire meetings between two militant groups (Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) and IFM) and the Provincial Governments of Guadalcanal and Malaita. Following a series of peace talks in Townsville, Australia, the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) was signed. This Agreement established the framework for working towards peace by establishing the Solomon Islands’ Peace Monitoring Council (PMC) and an International Peace Monitoring Team (IPMT) of unarmed police and civilians from Australia, New Zealand and Pacific island countries. Progress, however, was limited since the militants held on to many of their weapons, lawlessness continued around Honiara, and the formal economy was at a standstill. The success of these initiatives was limited because the adversaries in the conflict, particularly the militant leaders, were not involved with them. While Harold Keke and groups from Marau Sound were not part of the TPA process, one of the main problems with the TPA was that it was dominated by the two main militant groups and deliberately excluded civil society representatives. The latter, through the Solomon Islands Christian Association and Civil Society Peace Conference Communiqué, produced after a peace conference aboard a New Zealand frigate, had sought to be included in the Townsville negotiations but were excluded by the militant leaders.

In 2003 the Australian Government was invited by the newly-elected Solomon Islands’ Government to lead RAMSI. A consequence of this initiative was that more than 2000 police and soldiers from many member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum landed in the country and set about restoring law and order. Of all the peace initiatives undertaken, this was the one that hastened the return of the rule of law. Investor confidence was then restored and donor activity recommenced.

**The Place of Peace Education in Post-conflict Peace-building**

The inequitable distribution of development benefits, the harsh economic situation and recurring political crises have weakened the sovereignty of the state, resulting in the social disharmony experienced over the last thirty years. Successive governments have been unable to implement long-term solutions. The local culture (*kastom*), which is a social and traditional foundation of the Solomon Islands, was deliberately manipulated during the conflict to advance the personal and political interests of particular individuals and thus offers little hope for social reconstruction because its legitimacy suffered. If this misuse of *kastom* is not addressed now, these respected social and traditional values will not be available for future generations. This issue has given critical edge to the peace education; particularly its potential to reconcile breaches of *kastom*. 
The context within which RAMSI is operating is dramatically changing, particularly as the mission is drawing down resources as part of its transition and eventual exit. Therefore, widening its scope of operation in order to be responsive to local realities is likely to be undermined. To this end, this article argues that RAMSI should implement a deep intervention strategy to engage the services of foreign and local curriculum experts to develop a formal peace curriculum for secondary schools in the Solomon Islands. There is no legal provision for the development of a formal peace curriculum as a long term peace-building initiative in the new Truth, Reconciliation and Justice Bill which was adopted in 2009. However, curriculum development is a key function of the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) which can submit a concept paper for cabinet approval. Once cabinet approval is sought, development of a peace curriculum can commence, as the Education Act provides the legal framework for curriculum development in the country. While this process will take some time, the integration of peace topics into the school curriculum has already begun and can pave the way for the development of a fully-fledged peace curriculum in the future.

Education for Peace-in-Action

Education for Peace-in-Action is used in this article to refer to the peace education activities which are taught in schools and as well those activities which are extra curricular. The ethnic conflict led Solomon Islands authorities to rethink its school curriculum. In its search for alternatives, the Solomon Islands Government commissioned a study to look into overhauling the country’s entire education curriculum. This study released its findings in a 2008 report titled: National Curriculum Statement. The broad curriculum policy in this report is:

This National Curriculum Statement is an outcome of the Education Sector Investment Reform Programme (ESIRP) which began in 2004. The Education Reform has emphasized education for life, through which relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes can be acquired by pupils. The learning opportunities offered will enable learners to live in harmony with others and with their environment and to prepare for adult life and making a living.⁶

It is against this curriculum policy framework that the integration of peace education into the secondary school social studies curriculum was conceived. The integration of peace education topics is regarded as crucial for the new junior secondary school (Years 7-9) social studies curriculum. In the senior secondary school (Years 10-12) social studies curriculum the focus is more on studying conflicts and wars with little or no attention to peace-building. It is obvious that some aspects of peace-building are integrated across the Junior Secondary School curriculum as highlighted in

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Table 1 below. This means that learning activities in these subjects have components of peace which later lead to “a transferability of knowledge, skills and attitudes in real life”. As highlighted in Table 1, the focus on forgiveness and reconciliation in the ‘Christian Life within the Community’ strand is a real life example of what has been the practice in many communities.

In this sense the integration of peace education into the curriculum is one of the primary means for effecting sustainable development in the country. Thus, the primary goal of the curriculum reform as enshrined in the National Curriculum Statement is not merely to effect the integration of peace education into the curriculum, but to transform the Solomon Islands into a peaceful society and develop a sense of common citizenship to the larger task of nation-building.

The students in both junior and secondary levels not only learn about peace in the classroom, but they also practise it as their way of life. All students are affiliated to Christian denominations and their upbringing includes attending church services on Sundays. Schools also hold church services as part of their extra-curricular activities. During the Christmas break students usually form village choirs and go around neighbouring villages singing Christmas carols as a way of preaching the message of peace as embodied in their Christian beliefs. In terms of indigenous peace practices, the students participate in traditional ceremonies held in their villages. This is a testament to the strong articulation between indigenous beliefs, including peace practices, and introduced Christian beliefs and values—a common phenomenon throughout the Melanesian Pacific.

The students also participate in a number of sporting activities. Each school is assigned a teacher responsible for organising sports. Every Friday afternoon is devoted to sports and the popular games are soccer, volleyball, netball and athletics. Some of the secondary school students have been selected over the years to be part of their provincial soccer squad in the Solomon cup, which was held annually and brings together teams from all provinces. This is a national peace initiative aimed at creating a culture of peace among school children. This initiative is organised under the theme “national kids football, cultural exchange, and education festival”. In this national peace education program apart from playing soccer, participating schools also engaged in cultural exchange by way of showcasing their traditional dances and arts. The festival was an annual event in the past but was discontinued due to lack of funding. However, a similar event, which is called Carols in the Islands, has been on-going and usually attracts many school children in Honiara.

\[7\] Ibid., p. 5.
Table 1: Form 1-3 (Years 7-9) Secondary School Social Studies Peace Strand Links with Other Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Year Level</th>
<th>Strand Theme</th>
<th>Strand</th>
<th>Link Description (Sub Strand)</th>
<th>Link with Social Studies Syllabus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Cultural studies</td>
<td>Language Living in Harmony with others</td>
<td>Year 9 Practicing Peace building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Christian Life within the community</td>
<td>Forgiveness &amp; Reconciliation</td>
<td>Year 8 Practicing Peace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Earth &amp; Beyond</td>
<td>Earth &amp; Beyond</td>
<td>Tectonics, Earthquakes, tsunami &amp; volcano with implications for maintaining peace in times of natural disasters</td>
<td>Year 7 Volcanoes Earthquakes &amp; Tsunamis with implications for maintaining peace in times of natural disasters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Earth systems</td>
<td>Earth systems</td>
<td>Climate and weather with learning activities addressing peace through traditional adaptability strategies to changing climate and weather.</td>
<td>Year 8 Climate and weather with learning activities addressing peace through traditional adaptability strategies to changing climate and weather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Introduction to Agriculture</td>
<td>Shifting cultivation. This point to some aspects maintaining environmental peace through shifting cultivation.</td>
<td>Year 7 Shifting cultivation and its alternatives. This point to some aspects maintaining environmental peace through shifting cultivation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>Speaking or oral skills</td>
<td>Listening Skills, Reading and interpreting skills, Writing skills, Research in Library</td>
<td>Year 7-9 English skills and Language is used in learning of social studies curriculum contents particularly in learning activities dealing with conflict resolution and practicing peace.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *italic* inserts are the author’s interpretations.

Source: Curriculum Development Centre, Social Studies Syllabus for Secondary School (Years 7-9) (Honiara: Curriculum Development Centre, 2007), pp. 10-1.

For most provincial participants the festival may be their first time in the capital city (Honiara) and it is educational for them to visit the government Ministries, the National Parliament and other national institutions and organisations. Many rural schools’ principals who have attended the festival
commented that it created a sense of national identity for participating schools from outlying islands. Participation in the ‘national kids’ football, cultural exchange, and education festival’ rotates around the schools in each province so that every school has an opportunity to represent their province. This program inculcates in students a sense of national identity and social cohesion especially for isolated students from the remote provinces. For instance a principal commented:

When the school represented the province in the festival it changed the students’ worldview. Now the students are able to feel that though we are from Temotu Nendo we are part of a province called Temotu and Temotu is part of a country called the Solomon Islands.8

**Peace-building to Reconnect the Layers of Solomon Islands Society**

RAMSI has been the subject of debate among critical Solomon Islanders and foreign analysts. Many ordinary Solomon Islanders believe that if RAMSI leaves waves of crisis will arise again. The question is how long RAMSI will maintain law and order in the Solomon Islands while the issues that ignited the conflict are left unaddressed. As Kabutaulaka has argued:

foreign intervention, while useful in the short term, does not offer an easy solution to internal problems. It might create a quasi-functioning state that is able to restore order … but without addressing the underlying causes of unrest … the risk is it will create a culture of dependency.9

As alluded to earlier, the underlying causes of the conflict are deep-seated traditional issues of land and compensation, and they remain important during post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building. The process of peace-building as a pre-requisite to post-conflict reconstruction cannot advance if these issues are ignored. The danger is that the longer these issues remain unresolved, the more likely it is that resentment will build up. In addition, uneven development and grievances relating to powerful local perceptions of relative deprivation due to underlying causes would remain an obstacle to sustainable peace.

The services of RAMSI can be well utilised in post-conflict reconstruction if Solomon Islanders are part of the intervention, particularly when traditional issues are being dealt with. Foreign intervention without local input cannot solve complex traditional issues. In addition, the civil component of RAMSI must take a leading role in post-conflict reconstruction, including the services of civil engineers to build and repair bridges, roads and other infrastructural amenities. However, when this issue was raised by a Parliamentarian, RAMSI objected that these activities were beyond the scope of the

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8 Fieldwork Notes, 15 March 2010.
mission. This demonstrates the inherent dilemma with such interventions in how far external actors can/should go in addressing underlying problems without inducing debilitating levels of dependence on the part of local actors. Some would say that RAMSI has already crossed this line (by doing too much, rather than too little), leaving very high levels of local dependency as it contemplates drawdown and exit. This is a very difficult balancing act to achieve and which is shared, in varying degrees, across all substantial post-conflict reconstruction exercises.

For the last thirty years the Solomon Islands has survived through band-aid development. There have been waves of political instability and economic crisis. If RAMSI is going to have a positive impact on the development of the country, it is time to engage in the “deep intervention” advocated by Tim Anderson. For the Solomon Islands, deep intervention would include healing the real development wounds of the past and not merely providing a band-aid through the maintenance of law and order. Such sentiments were also echoed by Gaurav Sodhi, who stated that:

RAMSI has concentrated its efforts on peripheral problems and ignored the real constraints to growth ... agriculture is the key ... without land surveys, registration and long term leases there can be no progress ... without an economic growth outlook ... RAMSI has no exit strategy.

And as Anderson further added, it is “doubtful that RAMSI carried sufficient political will for such deep intervention”.

The longer RAMSI remains in the Solomon Islands in the absence of deep intervention the more likely it is that a new set of problems will arise that are detrimental to peace-building. In Honiara many residents are feeling the negative economic pinch of RAMSI’s presence. Hellen Maebuta has revealed that many locals are moving to squatte settlements because they can no longer afford the high monthly house rentals in the city. The Solomon Star on 16 January 2007 reported that:

any economic gains since RAMSI’s arrival in July 2003 were confined to and are urban-based, creating a bubble economy—a bubble which can burst at any time as it is at the mercy of politics. In real estate, for example, the rental market has gone through the roof in Honiara in the last three years—with a three-bedroom dwelling now fetching an average rental of SI$15,000 a month. As it is, the rental market is now out of reach for Solomon Islanders. Major employers including the Government are finding it hard to secure reasonable accommodation for its employees. A SI$5,000-

13 Anderson, ‘The Limits of RAMSI’.
a-month rental was considered excessive only three short years ago. Not anymore. Such a price is now at the bottom end of the rental market.15

This economic scenario provides evidence to substantiate one of Anderson’s critical analyses about RAMSI:

the ‘aid caravan’ in Honiara since 2003 has also brought with it a number of common and highly resented features that we could collectively characterise as ‘aid trauma’. These comprise: an inflationary ‘enclave bubble economy’, failures in human and institutional capacity building and relative deprivation.16

Anderson has raised issues that are of great value to the long-term development of the Solomon Islands. To achieve development in the post-conflict reconstruction era, the Solomon Islands needs a culturally-appropriate deep intervention beyond the limits of maintaining law and order. It was in this context that a motion to pave the way for a review of the Facilitation of International Assistance Act, under which RAMSI operates, was passed in Parliament on 24 July 2008. The motion mandated the Solomon Islands Foreign Relations Committee to find ways in which RAMSI can develop programs according to the aspirations and plans of the Solomon Islands.17 The committee’s findings and recommendations had highlighted a number of key issues and it will be interesting to see how these will be successfully implemented and sustained when RAMSI finally leaves.

A Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace (MNURP) was established in 2001 as a means to broker reconciliation and peace in the ethnic conflict. The ministerial functions include: peace and reconciliation; post-conflict rehabilitation; truth and reconciliation programs; and national unity programs. Following the ethnic conflict, reconciliation and peace were established through the provision of a peace and restoration fund. The fund ran from 2000-2004 and mainly concentrated on rebuilding schools that had been burnt down during the ethnic crisis. In the post-conflict era many of the reconciliation and peace initiatives which were undertaken by MNURP received mixed reactions. However, this did not deter the government from pursuing the peace process in the ‘Happy Isles’. In the 2008 national budget the government allocated SI$5 million for national reconciliation and peace programs. Of this amount, more than SI$3.3 million was for the truth and reconciliation process, SI$700,000 for promotion of national unity and peace, and SI$500,000 for training workshops and seminars for leaders to deal with conflict and prevention of violence. SI$450,000 was allocated for the

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promotion of peace-building and partnerships and networks. These national peace programs were aimed at bringing together different sectors of the Solomon Islands community. Educational initiatives such as seminars and workshops were designed to bring together communities who had been in conflict to mend broken relationships. However, the outcomes and effectiveness of these peace-building programs are yet to be evaluated. One of the key concerns is that peace seminars and workshops were a piecemeal approach because it was only for a short period of time compared to a school peace curriculum. In looking back to the early forms of reconciliation and peace-building, some of these initiatives should had been carried through and sustained by the functions of MNURP. For instance, the good work of the National Peace Council was prematurely disbanded.

The Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is a commission officially established by the Solomon Islands Government in April 2009. It has been formed to investigate the causes of the ethnic conflict that gripped the country between 1997 and 2003. The Commission is the first of its kind in the Pacific Islands region. The purpose of the TRC is to address the trauma experienced by people during the conflict. The members of the TRC began hearing testimony from witnesses, victims and perpetrators of the conflict in March 2010.

The Solomon Islands TRC model was derived from international experience (and to a large extent designed by international actors/agencies, such as the International Centre for Transitional Justice in New York who provided the technical assistance), and rather than being based on local circumstances and experience it draws on the model used in Sierra Leone. The common problem is that of institutional transfer in international development practice. While the overarching application of a truth commission is a valid undertaking, what remains to be tested is whether retributive and restorative justice takes on different meanings in small communities. The other peculiarity of the Solomon Islands TRC is that amnesties were established before truth-telling and the majority of the perpetrators had already been brought to trial and imprisoned before the TRC began operating. Such a mismatch opens up further areas of debate regarding the realities of the truth-telling process in the Solomon Islands. The question that remains is: how can the TRC meaningfully contribute to peace-building? Most Solomon Islanders have argued that inviting victims and perpetrators to testify in public hearings has not brought about true reconciliation, because in the culture of the Solomon Islands truth-telling is only able to bring about reconciliation and healing if the process is concluded with traditional rituals.

19 John Braithwaite et al., Pillars and Shadows: Statebuilding as Peacebuilding in Solomon Islands (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010).
As TRC hearings do not utilise traditional rituals, they are likely to re-open old wounds and breed new resentments.

Christian churches are one of the influential organisations of civil society in the Solomon Islands. About 95 per cent of the population is affiliated to the Christian faith: 34 per cent belong to the Church of Melanesia (Anglican), 19 per cent are Catholics, 17 per cent South Seas Evangelical Church (SSEC), 11 per cent United Church and 10 per cent Seventh Day Adventist (SDA). Along with these mainstream churches, the charismatic and Pentecostal churches, the Jehovah’s Witness and the Bahai faith are also active in the country. Over the years some Solomon Islanders have converted to the teachings of Islam. In almost every village throughout the country there is either a church building, or a church leader. Village daily routines begin with Morning Prayer meetings and end with evening prayers, which mean that churches have tended to be more influential in daily life than the state.

The Anglican Church made use of its influence in peace-building when it embarked on peace-building initiatives. The Anglican Communion News Service reported that from 28 April to 1 May 2008, about ninety members of the Church of Melanesia met for a four-day provincial consultation in Honiara on the theme: ‘Healing Past Hurts: A way forward for the Church of Melanesia’ in the Church’s Ministry of Reconciliation and Peace-building. The Consultation agreed on seven key areas for a reconciliation and peace-building ministry in the Church of Melanesia in the Solomon Islands: Healing Ministry; Mediating Ministry; Reconciliation Ministry; Marriage and Family Ministry; Rebuilding and Strengthening Christian societies in post-conflict areas; seeking justice for suffering people; and developing structures for coordinating, prioritising and implementing each ministry’s programs. Vital programs to spearhead the church’s peace-building process included: a family-based training centre for livelihood on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal; surveys to acquire more information on those affected by the violence; programs for displaced Malaitans; a ministry for former soldiers; memorial services for those lost; and further training for members of religious communities and others, particularly in the area of trauma-counselling and conflict resolution. This consultation was the beginning of the church’s healing process. Such a gathering was able to bring together conflicting parties in the spirit of their faith. It enabled church members who had been separated for many years to see each other again and share their stories of suffering and resurrection. These peace-building initiatives are built on the earlier roles of the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) Peace Office and various groups such as the Melanesian Brothers in initiating.

22 Ibid.
dialogue between rival groups, and the Sycamore Foundation in facilitating reconciliation between prisoners.23

The churches are well placed in the communities and therefore they can be effective in implementing peace-building programs. However, due to lack of financial support the churches could not adequately implement their programs. What the churches are doing in terms of peace-building is viewed by many as part of their pastoral duties to their flocks. While this is true, their work is part of the national peace-building initiatives which the government needs to recognise and become partners with the church. To make this happen, the Ministry of National Unity, Reconciliation and Peace needs to collaborate with the churches so that their peace-building programs are well coordinated to the national peace-building policies.

Conclusion

A key lesson arising from this discussion is that, given the mismatches between forms of peace-building, peace education in schools and community-based processes of building peace are as vital as larger national and international peace-building efforts. Thus, peace education to enhance grass-root peace-building initiatives, supported by infrastructural and community development activities, represents the most practical and successful approach. Given the disconnected layers in the country’s peace-building, the long term sustainability of peace remains a major challenge. Therefore, reconnecting peace-building initiatives through education could be a tool for civilisation of peace into the future.

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23 Braithwaite et al., Pillars and Shadows.
The Unintended Consequences of Fiji’s International Peacekeeping

Jone Baledrokadroka

The consequences of international peacekeeping operations on the domestic politics of a contributing country are an under-explored phenomenon. For Fiji, the intended outcome was that the fledgling state would play a positive role in international affairs. The unintended outcome was the development of a patron-client nexus between the ruling elite and the largely ethnic Fijian military. In the last twenty five years the military has intervened in domestic affairs, which has made Fiji a coup-prone state. This article considers why this has occurred.

By one account Fiji has taken part in more peacekeeping operations than any other nation in the world. This article examines the influence of international peacekeeping operations on the domestic politics of the country from which peacekeepers are drawn. How has participation in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions influenced military intervention in politics? In Fiji’s case, it is argued that experience in peacekeeping operations has influenced the Republic of Fiji Military Forces’ (RFMF) self image as a mediator of political tensions and executor of coups d’état. This has correspondingly led to the militarisation of the government by a largely ethnic Fijian military.

Independence and Fiji as a ‘Good International Citizen’

Fiji’s transition to Independence was peacefully negotiated and not the outcome of a de-colonisation conflict. Apart from the Viti Levu highlands pacification campaigns and the suppression of strike action against Indigenous and Indo-Fijians during colonial times, the military was historically apolitical. Unlike the Indonesian military, the Fijian military’s raison d’être was not determined by external or internal security threats. This raises the question as to how the RFMF developed an interventionist role akin to the Indonesian or Thai militaries, which always regarded themselves as political organisations. It is argued that the ideology of political intervention that now pervades the Fijian military’s senior command is an unintended consequence of the military’s experience in peacekeeping.

In 1978, Fijian troops were deployed to the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL). UNIFIL’s mandate, as stipulated in UN Security Council resolution 425, called for the protection of the people of Southern Lebanon.

from the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and various armed elements such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Afwaj Al-Mugamah Al-Lubnaniyya (AMAL) and more recently, Hezbollah. The 1st Battalion Fiji Infantry Regiment was raised with a mix of soldiers from the military’s territorial and regular forces. The unit, which had distinguished itself in the Solomon Islands and the Malayan insurgency campaign, was again overseas bound, only this time for peacekeeping. Firth states that this decision “still reverberates in the political life of Fiji, though in this case the consequences could not have been foreseen”. The intended outcome of this commitment for the new nation was recognition as a “good international citizen”, foreign exchange earnings and employment for youths.

However, the policy of the indigenous Fijian elite Alliance Government to commit troops was not debated in parliament. Fiji’s first Prime Minister, Ratu Mara, who was also responsible for Foreign Affairs, along with the Minister of Home Affairs, Ratu Penaia Ganilau, a Malayan campaign battalion commander, were instrumental in the decision to commit to UN peacekeeping. Indeed, a secret assessment of Mara by Australia’s High Commissioner in Suva revealed that: “[Mara] is prone to make decisions without reference to Cabinet or to bludgeon Cabinet into accepting his viewpoint”. Two of Ganilau’s junior officers, Mosese Buadromo and Paul Manueli, were Permanent Secretary of Home Affairs and Commander of the military respectively. The patron-client relationship that developed between the Alliance Government and the predominantly indigenous military, based on indigenous political paramountcy, underpinned this monumental foreign policy decision. Jim Sanday has contextualised the patron–client nexus as the chief-warrior (Turaga-bati) relationship and stressed that the Fijian military’s professionalism differed from the classical professionalism of the British military. Since its first peacekeeping deployment in 1978, the military’s peacekeeping role has been controversial, as it has unintentionally aided political instability in Fiji. It can be deduced that the confidence the RFMF gained from serving with larger nations’ militaries in international peacekeeping missions has given it an inflated corporate self image.

In addition, the Fijian Government’s agreement to provide a light battalion of 500 soldiers to UNIFIL necessitated that the military forces increase in size from 800 to 1300 in 1978. It was initially intended that Fijian soldiers would stay in Lebanon for a year or so, but they ended up staying for more than

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2 Stewart Firth, ‘Fiji at Forty’, Roundtable Paper, Australian National University, 8 October 2010.
3 National Federation Party (NFP) Opposition Leader Jai Ram Reddy assertion to Prof Brij Lal as revealed to author, 23 November 2009.
4 H.W. Bullock, Despatch no. 2/75(8 August), National Archives of Australia, A 1838.
two decades, not withdrawing until 2002. The pressure on the RFMF to sustain such a huge commitment was exacerbated in 1982 by an additional 500 man deployment as part of the US sponsored Multinational Forces Observers in Egypt. The RFMF was also called upon to participate in other peacekeeping missions with smaller numbers in Somalia, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kuwait, Sudan and Iraq. When armed conflict broke out closer to home in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste, Fiji peacekeepers joined mainly regional forces to enforce and monitor peace agreements. Firth argues that:

The principal consequence of this worldwide and regional soldiering by Fijians was to inflate the size of the RFMF far beyond what was needed to defend the territory of Fiji itself.\(^6\)

In addition, to meet the requirements of multiple missions, the RFMF increased the recommended UN six month tour of duty to one year for Fijian peacekeepers. Even this extension was not enough to ease the pressure of sustaining the two Middle East battalions for peacekeeping; hence the majority of Fijian peacekeepers served multiple tours. This placed enormous family and social pressure on Fijian peacekeepers.

With the government’s emphasis on nation-building post-Independence, the RFMF was given a lead role, as it was allocated responsibility for maritime surveillance and for implementing the Alliance Government’s national development goals in rural areas. Accordingly, the RFMF was given the following roles: 1) Defence of the nation; 2) Rural Development; 3) Protection of Economic Exclusive Zone; and 4) International Peacekeeping.\(^7\) This necessitated the formation of the RFMF’s Naval Division and Rural Development Units in 1975, which saw regular force numbers increase from 400 to 800.\(^8\) As a result, although the RFMF was a tiny force of 200 at independence, it had grown by more than ten times that amount by the time the first coup took place in 1987 (see Figure 1). Consequently, non-core roles became the force determinant for the RFMF, and encouraged its intervention in politics.

\(^{6}\) Firth, ‘Fiji at Forty’.
For its population size, Fiji’s military is quite large in comparison to its bigger neighbours: Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. Instead, its size is comparable to coup-prone countries in the Asian region: Myanmar, Thailand, Pakistan and Nepal (see Table 1). After peacekeeping deployments to Lebanon and Egypt, the further expansion of the military came as a direct result of the 1987 coup. To control the emergency situation, which critics argued had been created by the military in the first place, the military formed new infantry battalions overnight using reservists through recruitment drives. An elite Counter-Revolutionary Warfare unit was also formed to protect against potential anti-government armed insurgency. Ironically, as a consequence of executing an indigenous supremacist coup, the military appropriated a permanent internal security role. Moreover, the military’s role in defence of the nation came to mean internal, rather than external, security after the 1987 coup. The formation of the Counter-
Revolutionary Warfare unit emphasised this new military, and indeed political, role in internal security.

**Table 1: Comparison by Country of Number of Military Personnel Relative to Population Size**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Soldiers/1000 capita</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Soldiers/1000 capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Fiji—total military personnel 9500 (active and reserves) to 837,000 population.


Given the patronage of the ruling indigenous elite, since independence Fiji’s military can be said to have become a parallel state within a state. Its annual budget has consistently been overspent with impunity, and its influence over the office of the President has been dominant. Moreover, recruitment has heavily favoured indigenous Fijians. The huge ethnic disparity was put down to the unappealing nature of soldiering to Indo-Fijians. However, this heavily skewed ethnic recruitment has only reinforced a tacit belief within the institution that it is the bastion of indigenous political paramountcy. Ironically, though the 2006 coup was aimed at wiping out racial discrimination, including preferential treatment for indigenous Fijians, the military still remains 99 per cent indigenous Fijians.

By making peacekeeping the centrepiece of foreign policy, Fijian governments have unwittingly spawned political instability, as the military’s capability to intervene in domestic politics has become increasingly facilitated by the fact that its numbers have swelled due to overseas peacekeeping commitments.

**Lebanon Battleground of the Middle East**

Peacekeeping in Lebanon shaped the outlook of the RFMF as an institution. As David Hirst has aptly stated, “Lebanon … was almost designed to be the everlasting battleground for others’ political, strategic and ideological conflicts”. Indeed, not for nothing has the term *lebanisation* (‘Lebanonisation’) become a part of the French language, defined in the

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latest edition of *Larousse* as “a process of fragmentation of a state, as a result of confrontation between diverse communities”.¹¹

Fijian soldiers have been indelibly affected by the mediator role they performed when trying to defuse communal factional conflicts as part of peacekeeping in Lebanon. Firth has argued that:

Service abroad also accustomed Fijian military officers to the role played by military forces in imposing order, and gave them an understanding of military intervention in civil affairs in other parts of the world. Participation in peacekeeping not only necessitated a much larger Fiji military, it also required a more sophisticated one, whose officers were in a position to work effectively with UN officials, local politicians and other defence forces.¹²

Indeed, there is little doubt that in the RFMF there is a higher premium placed on the diplomatic, humanitarian and negotiating skills of soldiers than on fighting ability.¹³

The tragic Qana massacre of Lebanese civilians inside a Fijian UN position during the IDF Operation *Grapes of Wrath* in 1996 illustrates the point. Unlike the Srebrenica massacre, where Dutch peacekeepers bowed to pressure not to shelter Bosnian refugees, Fijians opened their headquarters to fleeing civilians during heavy Israeli shelling of Southern Lebanon. For the Lebanese, the Qana massacre became the tragic symbol of “national unity” restored, assisted by the humanitarian spirit of the UN’s Fijian peacekeepers.¹⁴ Indeed, the humanitarian face of peacekeeping displayed by Fijian soldiers in this tragic event gave rise to the perception within the RFMF that the military has a role in human security.¹⁵

Fijian troops serving with the UN have gained a reputation as “no nonsense” peacekeepers. As they hail from a small South Pacific nation, relatively isolated from partisan global politics, this has reinforced their impartial image, which is vital to international peacekeeping. An incident in 1988 illustrates this: a Fijian soldier from the UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon was wounded in a shootout with Shiite Moslem militiamen. According to UN sources:

> The peacekeeper was shot in the chest during a 20-minute fire-fight with six gunmen of the Syrian-backed Amal militia in Ein Baal, six miles southeast of the southern port city of Tyre. The sources said the shooting broke out when soldiers manning a Fijian checkpoint in Ein Baal tried to prevent the militiamen from driving their green Volvo station wagon into U.N.-policed territory with their arms. "When the Fijian checkpoint told them they cannot

¹¹ Ibid., p. 2.
¹² Firth, ‘Fiji at Forty’.
cross, they headed for a dirt road. A Fijian soldier fired a warning shot in the air,” one source said. “The armed elements apparently thought they were under fire, so they shot back and a firefight ensued in which one armed element also was slightly wounded.”

Fijian soldiers on peacekeeping duties in the volatile Middle East have thus been praised for their restraint and humanitarian qualities. These encounters have indelibly shaped the mediator self-image of military officers, many of whom are now senior bureaucrats in the Bainimarama regime.

A UN documentary from the 1980s, *The Man in the Middle*, which featured Fijian soldiers, captured the dangerous and arduous role of peacekeepers and raised their international peacekeeping profile. The accompanying UN public relations abstract for the film epitomises the point being made that:

> Since 1978 a small force of 6,000 United Nations soldiers has tried to keep the peace in southern Lebanon. This multinational peacekeeping force acts out its role as a buffer between the various factions. The United Nations interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has not yet been able to fulfil entirely the mandate entrusted to it by the Security Council. However, by its presence, it maintains a semblance of peace and restricts armed conflict that might otherwise envelop the entire Middle East. The film tells the story of the effects of war on a land and its people.

Arguably the Fiji military’s domestic political role has been influenced by its initial UNIFIL and subsequent peacekeeping experiences, where the mediator role became engrained in the collective military psyche.

**Unintended Consequences of UN Peacekeeping**

Since the first UN peacekeeping mission in Kashmir in 1949 there has been a body of literature which stresses that participation in peace operations is beneficial for military institutions, as it is said to encourage them to adhere to international civil–military standards and civilian control. Recently a literature on the unintended consequences of UN peacekeeping on a nation and its military force has emerged, although its scope does not include the political dimension highlighted in this article.

In 1989 a senior RFMF officer presented a paper to the President and interim Prime Minister on the perceived threats facing Fiji. In that paper a

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Middle Eastern scenario was envisaged for Fiji that was predicted to necessitate fifteen years of military rule. Similarly, current military regime leader Commodore Frank Bainimarama has objected to the use of “interim” for his government. According to regime defector and senior military officer Colonel Tevita Mara, Bainimarama has intimated his vision of fifty years of military rule, illustrating his confidence in his ability to govern, given the militarisation of many top government positions.

Deryk Scarr has argued that Fiji’s UN peacekeeping contributions have considerably raised the country’s international profile, but have not enhanced the military’s Westminster brand of professionalism. It is argued that the expansion of the military’s political role since the first coup in 1987 was underpinned by participation in international peacekeeping missions, and that service with UNIFIL peacekeeping operations established the self-image of Fiji’s military elite as political mediators. By the time the battalion had pulled out in 2002, the mediator role forged in Lebanon became engrained in the collective military psyche and valorised by the deaths of thirty seven Fiji soldiers. That the involvement of Fijian troops in peacekeeping in the Middle East attracted much international attention also gave them a sense of self-belief in being part of a complex diplomatic solution of global proportions. Furthermore, being identified with other foreign soldiers engendered a wider sense of corporate identity in their profession. Officers who were central to the military’s role in coups, such as Rabuka in 1987, Filipo Tarakinikini in 2000 and Pita Driti in 2006, were all previous commanders of Fiji’s peacekeeping battalion in Lebanon.

**Rabuka’s Coup**

The adoption of a political mediator role by Rabuka in executing the 1987 coup seemed all too sudden, given the Fiji military’s much touted professionalism and apolitical role since Independence. Civil-military relations were transformed at the expense of the previous ‘civilian supremacy’ model, revealing the fragility of democracy post-Independence.

What brought about the change in military mindset? It is argued that international peacekeeping, especially in the Middle East, imbued a confident ‘mediator’ disposition amongst Fiji’s military officers. The implication of a ‘Lebanon situation’ is quite obvious in Rabuka’s coup operational orders (OPORD 1/87). In the conclusion to the OPORD Rabuka clearly states that “You will see that the sit [sic] Fiji is in is dangerous and will

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19 RFMF Senior Officers Presentation Paper to President and Interim Prime Minister, 28 August 1989.
develop into something much worse and resembling Lebanon and other troubled areas of the world.”

Doing a tour of duty in Lebanon, mediating and liaising amongst factional leaders such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Hezbollah, was part of a Fijian senior officer’s routine. Many of the senior officers approved of the 1987 Rabuka coup, guided by their ethnic political loyalties and peacekeeping experiences. At the strategic level the unintended consequences of peacekeeping both socially and politically may not have been examined as it was never debated in parliament. UN academic specialist Ramesh Thakur first examined Fiji’s UN peacekeeping participation as a positive instrument of the Alliance Government’s foreign policy. He analysed the contributions of mini-states and how Fiji was “punching above its weight” in international macro cooperation and creating a niche market for itself. Andrew Scobell was one of the first to argue that Fiji’s international peacekeeping role was a factor in Rabuka executing the coups of 1987. The 1987 Fiji Labour Party election manifesto had also “deplored the Royal Fiji Military Forces as becoming more of a band of mercenaries for the UN and MFO [Multinational Force and Observers] and its role should be reviewed”. Scobell asserted it was the threat to this corporate interest that spurred Rabuka to act in toppling the Indo-Fijian dominated Fiji Labour Party/National Federation Party Coalition Government. Writing prior to the 1987 coup Thakur saw the positives, while Scobell’s analysis afterwards dwelled on the risks of peacekeeping.

Australian aid to the RFMF through its Defence Cooperation Programme (DCP) has enabled it to grow and sustain its peacekeeping operations capability. Australia has provided training, logistics and infrastructure support to the RFMF on practically all of its peacekeeping missions. State-of-the-art 500 man mess hall and kitchen facilities were built in Queen Elizabeth Barracks Suva in 1984 and a fourteen bed military hospital built in 1996 through DCP. The mounting of a UN Fijian contingent to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq in 2004 was made possible with DCP logistic support.

**Peacekeepers to Mercenaries**

In November 2005, the relationship between Fiji and Papua New Guinea became strained in the wake of reports that nine Fijian soldiers, believed to be mercenaries and former UN peacekeepers in the Middle East, were reportedly training a private militia on the island of Bougainville. Solomon

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23 Thakur, ‘Mini State and Macro Cooperation’, pp. 269-84.
Islands Police Commissioner Shane Castles was quoted on 21 March 2006 as saying that police was aware that a Fijian security company was recruiting former Fijian soldiers and facilitating their movement through the Solomon Islands to Bougainville. The Bougainville President Joseph Kabui also stated that up to 100 Fijian Mercenaries could be on the way to the island. On Australian national television, Kabui called on the governments of Fiji and Papua New Guinea to prevent their passage. Fiji Peacekeepers Association spokesman Taniela Senikuta blamed the Fiji Government’s policy for the illegal activities in which some former soldiers were engaged. He pointed out that, while returned servicemen from World War II received pensions, soldiers returning from peacekeeping duties did not, which made employment abroad, even in questionable ventures, attractive. Again, the unintended consequence of having a large body of trained soldiers and former peacekeepers that are unemployed is of concern not only to internal stability but to regional stability as a whole.

Fiji and Peacekeeping Ban

Despite Fiji’s military being warned by the UN secretariat in November 2006 that if it conducted a coup, overthrew its government, and installed a military-led regime, its contribution to UN-led operations would be reduced or suspended, the UN actually increased the number of Fiji personnel deployed in the immediate post-coup period. The Secretary General’s office has admitted that:

The United Nations struggles to recruit professional and well-trained troops for peacekeeping duties in areas where those soldiers are potentially preventing civilian deaths from conflict. As a result they have often been forced to accept deployments from nations whose domestic human rights records are questionable.

Consequently, countries that have had coups in the recent past, such as Pakistan and Thailand, have been troop contributors to recent UN peacekeeping missions. A recent UN Mission Summary Report shows that on 31 May 2012, Fiji had deployed 359 soldiers and/or police to UN operations. This same report showed that Australia had contributed 112 personnel, Canada 158 and New Zealand twenty four. The data as compiled by Selwyn Manning shows that the governments of Australia and New Zealand have not impeded the participation of Fijian troops in UN peacekeeping operations. In May 2007, a spokesperson for New Zealand’s then foreign minister, Winston Peters, said:

27 Fijivillage.com, 11 February 2006.
New Zealand believes it is inappropriate for troops from Fiji to take part in UN operations at a time when the Fiji military has overthrown a democratically-elected government. We are also aware of the financial value of peacekeeping duties for Fiji's military.  

Former Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, had also asserted that:

> Through our interventions with the United Nations, supported by New Zealand and other countries, the UN now is not going to engage future Fijian troops for new operations. There is a question which now arises as to whether there should be a further tightening on top of that.

As recently as May 2012 Fiji was invited to send eight UN military officers as observers to Syria, which it did. In spite of public calls and regional pressure to ban Fiji’s further participation, it has not impeded a rise in the number of Fiji troops being deployed to UN operations since the December 2006 military coup.

**Conclusion**

For Fiji it was enticing to be recognised as a good international citizen by engaging in peacekeeping missions. Ratu Penaia Ganilau, the Minister of Home Affairs responsible for the military, would have needed little persuasion to undertake such a commitment, given the inherent Turaga-bati (patron-client) relationship between the ruling elite and the military. Prime Minister Mara’s decision to commit troops resonates with Argentinean President Carlos Menem’s decision to engage in UN peacekeeping for, “the low cost opportunity to receive overseas payments and perform a positive military role overseas which converged with foreign policy.” The expected spin-offs were attractive to a young independent nation. However, the decision later proved to have far-reaching and destabilising consequences for the nation. Engaging in peacekeeping has had the unintended consequence of encouraging the military to develop a political mediator role. However, there is a contradiction between conforming to international peacekeeping norms and the allegations of violations of human rights brought against the military in the 1987, 2000 and 2006 coups. It appears that the United States, New Zealand and Australia have turned a blind eye to Fiji’s continued deployment in international peacekeeping because of its troops’ prowess and professionalism in the field.

The expanded mediator role however of Fiji’s military is now inconsistent with the western definition of military professionalism as adhered to prior to the 1987 coup. Hence the militarisation of government and society at large has continued with Commodore Bainimarama’s coup of 2006.

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30. Ibid.
Jone Baledrokadroka

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Notes for Contributors

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