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# The Solomon Islands—RAMSI, Transition and Future Prospects

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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 predated 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.<sup>1</sup> What others referred to as Australia's "new interventionism",<sup>2</sup> 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;<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> Binoy Kampmark, 'The Solomon Islands: The Limits of Intervention', *New Zealand International Review*, vol. 28, no. 6 (2003), pp. 6-9.

<sup>2</sup> Greg Fry, "'Our Patch': The War on Terror and the New Interventionism", in G. Fry and T.T. Kabutaulaka (eds), *Intervention and State-building in the Pacific: The Legitimacy of 'Cooperative Intervention'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 72-86.

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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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<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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",<sup>6</sup> 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".<sup>7</sup> 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".<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Cambridge, MA: World Peace Foundation, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Elsin Wainwright, *Our Failing Neighbour: Australia and the Future of Solomon Islands* (Canberra: Australian Policy Institute, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Allen and Sinclair Dinnen, 'The North Down Under: Antinomies of Conflict and Intervention in Solomon Islands', *Conflict, Security and Development*, vol. 10, no. 3 (July 2010), pp. 299-327.

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".<sup>10</sup> This reading, in turn, represented a shift away "from a particularist and developmental lens to a global and security lens in viewing Pacific developments".<sup>11</sup>

## 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".<sup>12</sup> 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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<sup>10</sup> Shahar Hameiri, 'Mitigating the Risk to Primitive Accumulation: State-building and the Logging Boom in Solomon Islands', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 42, no. 3 (August 2012), p. 412.

<sup>11</sup> Greg Fry and Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, 'Political Legitimacy and State-building Intervention in the Pacific', in G. Fry and T.T. Kabutaulaka (eds), *Intervention and State-building in the Pacific: The Legitimacy of 'Cooperative Intervention'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p.16.

<sup>12</sup> Solomon Mamaloni, 'The Road to Independence', in R. Crocombe and E. Tuza (eds), *Independence, Dependence, Interdependence: The First 10 Years of Solomon Islands Independence* (Honiara: Government Printing Press, 1992), p. 14.

promise and uneven pattern 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> A related aspect of these popular grievances concerns the perceived failure of the formal sector of government to engage with the local

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<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> 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).

<sup>15</sup> 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.

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 the 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”,<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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—

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<sup>16</sup> Alexander Downer, ‘Our Failing Neighbour: Australia and the Future of the Solomon Islands’, Address at the launch of the ASPI Report, Sydney, 10 June 2003.

<sup>17</sup> As listed on the RAMSI website: <<http://www.ramsi.org/about/what-is-ramsi.html>>.

many of them seconded Australian public servants<sup>18</sup>—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”.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.

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<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> Stewart Patrick and Kaysie Brown, *Greater than the Sum of its Parts? Assessing ‘Whole of Government’ Approaches to Fragile States* (New York: International Peace Academy, 2007), p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> See, ‘Careful Planning Puts Archipelago in the Sun’, *The Australian*, 15 June 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Sinclair Dinnen, ‘Dilemmas of Intervention and the Building of State and Nation’, in S. Dinnen and S. Firth (eds), *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands* (Canberra: Asia-Pacific Press, 2008), pp. 1-38.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-26.

<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> Rumours of renewed ethnic tensions in early 2012 were unequivocally dismissed by spokespersons for the two former militias.<sup>26</sup> 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

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<sup>24</sup> 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/>>

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Allen, *Long-term Engagement: The Future of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands* (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2011), p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> 'Ex-militants Warned of False Information', *Solomon Star*, 5 April 2012.

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,<sup>27</sup> 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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<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup>

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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<sup>28</sup> World Bank, *Solomon Islands Growth Prospects: Background Materials and Analysis* (Sydney: World Bank, Pacific Division, 2010)

<sup>29</sup> Allen, *Long-term Engagement*, p. 2.

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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup>

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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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.

<sup>31</sup> Sinclair Dinnen and Nicole Haley, *Evaluation of the Community Officer Project in Solomon Islands* (Washington DC: World Bank, Justice for the Poor, Research Report, May 2012), pp. 1-54. Accessible via: <[www.worldbank.org/justiceforthe poor](http://www.worldbank.org/justiceforthe poor)>.