

A 'helpem fren' in need... Evaluating the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands

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This article identifies tests which evaluate two phases of intervention to prevent state failure: short-term (preventive) effectiveness and long-term (reconstructive) effectiveness. These tests are applied to the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). It is argued that RAMSI has been a success and – at least in the short-term – effective. A number of early lessons from the preventive phase of RAMSI are then identified. It is noted that as RAMSI steps up its reconstructive phase, challenges lie ahead which may affect its ongoing effectiveness. Finally, conclusions are drawn about whether this evaluation proves instructive in respect of Australia's future policies in the Southwest Pacific.

Introduction

In 1998 the Solomon Islands became gripped by a low-intensity civil war, which culminated in a coup in June 2000. Following the coup the conflict continued, particularly around the capital Honiara, where businesses were harassed for money, vehicle theft and break-ins were a daily occurrence, and government property was regularly looted. Australia helped to negotiate the Townsville Peace Agreement in October 2000 as a response to the crisis. However, its implementation was largely unsuccessful and law and order further broke down, which affected the economy and the government's ability to deliver services. The continuing deterioration of the Solomon Islands' security led several commentators – and the Australian government – to diagnose it as a 'failing' state.

In response to this diagnosis Australia helped to mount the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI).¹ RAMSI commenced on 24 July 2003 and was a response to a request by the Solomon Islands' Prime Minister for assistance. RAMSI was approved by the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF)² and the Solomon Islands' government.³ Within the Solomon Islands there was also widespread support from the public and local

¹ In the Solomon Islands RAMSI was initially referred to as 'Operation Helpem Fren'.

² 'Forum Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting: Outcome Statement', Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 30 June 2003, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/spacific/regional_orgs/ffamm_solomons_0306.html>. (Accessed 10 July 2005).

³ RAMSI was approved by the Solomon Islands' parliament on 17 July 2003 with the passage of the Facilitation of International Assistance Act 2003.

organisations.⁴ RAMSI is police-led, with the initial deployment consisting of over 2000 personnel from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Tonga and Fiji, although the majority of personnel come from Australia.⁵ Indeed, RAMSI is the largest armed intervention undertaken by Australia in the Southwest Pacific since World War II. Moreover, rather than merely being a mission to restore law and order, RAMSI is intended to be a long-term project aimed at re-building the nation's economy and the political and administrative functions of the government.

Both the Australian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister have noted that RAMSI is a significant change in Australian policy, which was previously dominated by ideas of non-intervention and respect for state sovereignty,⁶ to 'cooperative intervention' to prevent state failure.⁷ As this represents a significant change, it is important to investigate whether this new policy is effective. Moreover, while the Prime Minister explicitly denies that RAMSI establishes a precedent for future Australian intervention in the region,⁸ Australia continues to be involved in the Solomon Islands, PNG, Nauru, Fiji and Vanuatu. Australia's response to the recent breakdown in law and order in East Timor provides further evidence of its willingness to intervene in states which face instability.⁹ Therefore, it is important to investigate the implications of RAMSI for Australia's future involvement in these states as well as others in the region.

It is also important to investigate the implications of RAMSI in relation to broader debates concerning humanitarian intervention, including intervention to prevent state failure. The debate relating to humanitarian intervention has received more attention as states have been increasingly willing to intervene to prevent humanitarian crises. Most recently, humanitarian intervention was debated during the United Nations (UN) reform process, as the two major UN reform reports posit the idea of the 'responsibility to protect'.¹⁰ Moreover, debates relating to intervention to prevent state failure have increased resonance following 11 September 2001 as both states and commentators have come to see state failure as a security – rather than

⁴ Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, 'Political Reviews: Solomon Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Fall 2004, p. 393.

⁵ Samoa, Cook Islands, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Nauru and Tuvalu have since also joined RAMSI.

⁶ As reflected in the Foreign Affairs White Paper released in February 2003. White Paper: *Advancing the National Interest, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, 12 February 2003, <<http://www.dfat.gov.au/ani/index.html>>. (Accessed 10 July 2005).

⁷ 'Downer says law and order must be established first in the Solomons', interview on ABC Radio PM, reporter Graeme Dobell, 25 June 2003.

⁸ John Howard, 'Transcript of the Prime Minister, the Hon. John Howard, MP, Press Conference, Canberra', 22 July 2003, <<http://www.pm.gov.au/news/interviews/Interview382.html>>. (Accessed 10 July 2005).

⁹ Paul Kelly, 'End of the illusions', *The Australian*, 17 May 2006.

¹⁰ *A more secure world: our shared responsibility, Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*, UN Doc. A/59/565; *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all, Report of the Secretary-General*, UNGA 59th session, 21 March 2005, UN Doc. A/59/2005.

humanitarian – issue. At an international level this idea has most recently been manifested in the US-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. While RAMSI was invited and can thus be distinguished from those interventions, the tests identified in this article to determine the effectiveness of intervention are generally applicable to other interventions. Moreover, it has been argued that both the US and the wider international community can learn a number of lessons from RAMSI concerning the conduct of humanitarian interventions, including interventions to prevent state failure.¹¹

This article aims to evaluate RAMSI's effectiveness by considering the literature relating to state failure and intervention and by identifying tests that can be used to evaluate whether RAMSI is an effective way to deal with instability in the Solomon Islands. It should be noted that it is beyond the scope of this article to consider whether the diagnosis of the Solomon Islands as a 'failing' state – which was a key motivation behind the Australian government's decision to lead RAMSI – was correct. It is argued that even if this diagnosis is disputed, because RAMSI is underway it is necessary to evaluate its effectiveness.

This article identifies tests to evaluate the two phases of intervention: first, short-term (preventive) effectiveness, which relates to dealing with the immediate crises and restoring peace; and second, long-term (reconstructive) effectiveness, which relates to rebuilding the political, social and economic structures of the state.¹² By applying these tests to RAMSI this article argues that RAMSI has been a success and that – at least in the short-term – intervention is an effective way to deal with the problems faced by the Solomon Islands. However, it is argued that while RAMSI appears to satisfy most of the tests of short-term (preventive) intervention, it satisfies fewer tests of long-term (reconstructive) intervention. Moreover, this article notes that while lessons can be learnt from the conduct of the preventive phase of RAMSI, as RAMSI steps up its reconstructive phase a number of challenges lie ahead which may affect its ongoing effectiveness. Finally, this article draws conclusions about whether this evaluation proves instructive in respect of future developments in the Southwest Pacific and the broader debate relating to intervention.

When is Intervention Effective?

An assessment of whether an intervention is effective depends upon whether the intervention achieved its aims. At the time RAMSI was launched the Solomon Islands was diagnosed as a failing state. RAMSI is therefore aimed at preventing the Solomon Islands from becoming a failed

¹¹ Gerard Finin, 'Democracy, Security and Good Governance in the South-West Pacific', speech delivered at the Australian Institute of International Affairs, Melbourne, 26 September 2005.

¹² Ibrahim A. Gambari, 'The Role of Foreign Intervention in African Reconstruction', in I. William Zartman (ed.), *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995, p. 223.

state. To determine RAMSI's effectiveness this article will identify tests which focus on whether RAMSI deals with the problems contributing to state failure so that the Solomon Islands' state is strengthened. While there is no one standard of "healthy behaviour for 'successful' (non-failing or non-collapsing) states",¹³ this article argues that a strong state is one which fulfils its obligations under the social contract, and resembles a liberal democracy.

Preventive Tests of Effectiveness

(A) HAS THE INTERVENTION ENDED THE FIGHTING AND HAS LAW AND ORDER BEEN RESTORED?

The first test of preventive intervention is whether it halts fighting. Indeed, Kaldor says that the primary requisite is to restore law and order so that normal life can resume and refugees and displaced persons can be repatriated. She says that this includes "disarmament, demobilization, protection of the area, capture of war criminals, policing and/or establishing and training local police forces and the restoration of the judiciary".¹⁴

(B) HAS THE INTERVENTION SOUGHT TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE FIGHTING TOOK PLACE?

The second test of preventive intervention is whether it has sought to understand why the fighting took place, as Chopra and Hohe argue that it is not enough to focus on the armed forces competing for control. Instead, there "has to be an intimate understanding of why the population is engaged in strife and what fuels it".¹⁵

(C) HAS THE ECONOMY BEEN RESTORED?

As the purpose of preventive intervention is to end fighting and re-establish law and order, in order to pay for this the local economy must be restored. Kaldor argues that to the extent that preventive intervention is "a strategy for peace" it has to "provide economic security and hope for the future so as to remove the atmosphere of fear in which people live, and to offer, young people especially, an alternative livelihood to the army or mafia".¹⁶

(D) HAS THE INTERVENTION INVOLVED MORE THAN A MILITARY RESPONSE?

While preventive interventions have historically emphasised a military approach, Kaldor argues that because "new wars" (particularly state failure) are a "mixture of war, crime and human rights violations...the agents of

¹³ I. William Zartman, 'Early and "early late" prevention', in Simon Chesterman et. al. (eds.), *Making States Work: State Failure and the Crisis of Governance*, Tokyo, United Nations University Press, 2005, p. 281.

¹⁴ Mary Kaldor, 'Towards a Cosmopolitan Approach', in Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999, p. 134.

¹⁵ Jarat Chopra and Tanja Hohe, 'Participatory Intervention', *Global Governance*, Vol. 10, 2004, p. 291.

¹⁶ Kaldor, 'Towards a Cosmopolitan Approach', p. 135.

cosmopolitan law-enforcement have to be a mixture of soldiers and policemen”.¹⁷ Similarly, Chesterman, Ignatieff and Thakur note that as most Southwest Pacific states do not have a real military capacity, their problems have been caused by the failure of the police forces and therefore require a “robust policing” response.¹⁸

(E) HAS THE INTERVENTION GAINED AND SUSTAINED THE SUPPORT OF THE LOCAL POPULATION, AND HAVE THERE BEEN VISIBLE CHANGES FOR THE BETTER?

Finally, while it is not emphasised in the literature, this article argues that a fifth test should be whether the intervention gains and sustains the support of the local population, an element of which is that there have been visible changes for the better. Without the support of the people, the strength of the state, and the legitimacy of the government and intervention will be undermined.

Reconstructive Tests of Effectiveness

(A) WAS THE STATE STRENGTHENED?

As the purpose of intervention is to go beyond restoring peace to rebuild the political and economic structures of a state, the first test of reconstructive effectiveness is whether the state has been strengthened. There is debate over the appropriateness of Westphalian state structures and therefore of the goal of strengthening such a structure. However, this article argues that the state should be restored, as weakened states cannot meet their responsibilities.¹⁹ Indeed, Ignatieff argues that “without the basic institutions of a state, no basic human rights protection is possible”.²⁰ Similarly, Keohane agrees that the state “remains the principal unit of protection and collective action in the contemporary world”.²¹

(B) HAS A LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT BEEN PUT IN PLACE?

After strengthening the state, the second test should be whether the government of that state is legitimate. Indeed, Zartman says that legitimacy must be restored early, “through constructive participation and freely expressed support from society”.²² Kaldor agrees, arguing that the key to any long-term solution is “the restoration of legitimacy, the reconstitution of

¹⁷ Mary Kaldor, ‘Introduction’, in Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, p. 11.

¹⁸ Simon Chesterman et. al., ‘Conclusion: The Future of State-Building’, in Chesterman et. al. (eds.), *Making States Work*, p. 380.

¹⁹ I. William Zartman, ‘Putting Things Back Together’, in Zartman (ed.), *Collapsed States*, pp. 267-8.

²⁰ Michael Ignatieff, ‘Intervention and State Failure’, *Dissent*, Vol. 49, Iss. 1, Winter 2002, p. 119.

²¹ Robert O. Keohane, ‘Political authority after intervention: graduations in sovereignty’, in J.L.

Holzgrefe and Robert O. Keohane (eds.), *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal, and Political Dilemmas*, p. 277.

²² Zartman, ‘Putting Things Back Together’, p. 270.

the control of organized violence by public authorities,” which she regards as both a political and legal process.²³

(C) HAS LIBERAL DEMOCRACY BEEN ACHIEVED?

The third test of effectiveness is whether liberal democracy has been achieved. There is scepticism whether liberal democracy can work in societies with acute religious or ethnic divisions, or in states where there is no tradition of a state.²⁴ Indeed, Von Einsiedel emphasises that it is “crucial not to focus simply on the holding of elections and to neglect other elements such as the rule of law,” warning that “democratization should not be seen as a panacea”.²⁵ Despite this scepticism it is argued that the achievement of liberal democracy should be a test of reconstructive effectiveness.

(D) HAS LOCAL LEADERSHIP BEEN ENGAGED?

A key element of creating a legitimate government and of ensuring that liberal democracy works is to involve local leaders. Therefore, the fourth test is whether the local leadership has been engaged. This is crucial because Chesterman, Ignatieff and Thakur conclude that:

success in maintaining the viability and legitimacy of a state requires enlightened local leadership, coherent institutional coordination and international assistance...for consolidating a national response.²⁶

(E) HAVE INTERNAL FORCES BEEN ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS?

Similarly, commentators note that because the causes of state failure are usually endogenous in nature, not only local political elites, but also other internal forces must be harnessed when attempting a state’s recovery.²⁷ Indeed, Zartman emphasises that the state cannot be reinstated without a parallel effort to “rebuild civil society and to integrate the workings of the two”.²⁸ Hegarty et. al. agree that domestic ownership of reconstruction is essential.²⁹

²³ Kaldor, ‘Introduction’, p. 10.

²⁴ Michael Ignatieff, ‘Human Rights, Power and the State’, in Chesterman et. al.(eds.), *Making States Work*, p. 71.

²⁵ Sebastian von Einsiedel, ‘Policy responses to state failure’, in Chesterman et. al. (eds.), *Making States Work*, p. 27.

²⁶ Simon Chesterman et. al., ‘Introduction: Making States Work’, in Chesterman et. al. (eds.), *Making States Work*, p. 9.

²⁷ Daniel Thurer, ‘The “failed state” and international law’, International Committee of the Red Cross, 31 December 1999, <<http://www.icrc.orgm>>. (Accessed 10 July 2005).

²⁸ Zartman, ‘Putting Things Back Together’, pp. 268-9.

²⁹ David Hegarty et. al., “Rebuilding State and Nation in Solomon Islands: Policy Options for the Regional Assistance Mission”, *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2004/2*, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2004, p. 4.

IS RAMSI EFFECTIVE?

Most commentators agree that – so far – RAMSI has been a success.³⁰ However, no commentator claims that RAMSI has been an unqualified success, and therefore this article will apply the tests identified above to RAMSI in order to assess both its preventive and reconstructive effectiveness.

Applying Preventive Tests of Effectiveness to RAMSI

(A) HAS THE INTERVENTION ENDED THE FIGHTING AND HAS LAW AND ORDER BEEN RESTORED?

During its first phase, ranging from when it deployed in July 2003 to the beginning of 2004, RAMSI acted as “an effective circuit breaker to the lawlessness in Solomon Islands”.³¹ Moreover, in part through the use of amnesties, law and order has largely been restored, more than 3,600 weapons have been recovered and over 6,300 arrests have been made.

During its second phase, which lasted through all of 2004, RAMSI focused on the consolidation of the rule of law. RAMSI made progress cleaning up the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), and new recruits were trained and commenced policing duties. The Participating Police Force (PPF) has conducted joint patrols and community policing with the RSIPF, provided guard and security services and has pursued criminal investigations. Since the beginning of 2005 the third phase has seen the PPF increase its focus on training, mentoring and advising the RSIPF. RAMSI has also provided support to the justice and prison systems, and has constructed facilities. Legal experts are also performing roles such as Solicitor General and Public Solicitor and serving as magistrates and prosecutors.

However, while RAMSI has had success ending the fighting and restoring law and order during its first two phases, there is a risk that fighting may recommence, as the turmoil that followed the April 2006 election illustrates. The riots that followed the election were initially motivated by Snyder Rini’s appointment as Prime Minister, as it was perceived that he was captive to the Chinese business community. The riots also targeted the Chinese business community in Honiara, whose success has given rise to some resentment, which indicates a potential future source of tension. There is also the risk of further inter-island conflict, with the Malaita Separatist Movement (MSM) emerging to claim that RAMSI discriminates against

³⁰ See for example, Elsin Wainwright, speech delivered at the Asia-Pacific Solferino Lecture Series, University of Melbourne, 16 March 2005; Jon Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, Wellington, Victoria University Press, 2004; Clive Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis*, Canberra, Asia Pacific Press, 2004.

³¹ Elsin Wainwright, *How is RAMSI faring? Progress, challenges, and lessons learned*, Canberra, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2005, p. 2.

Malaitans.³² The MSM has indicated that it has weapons and is implicated in the sniper murder of Adam Dunning, an Australian Protective Services officer, on 22 December 2004.

Fraenkel notes that while arrests have been made, securing convictions is “far more difficult” as methods of gathering evidence are “poorly planned” and RAMSI officers have “grappled with understandable difficulty to fathom the complexities of the five-year crisis”.³³ Moreover, RAMSI has had difficulty persuading witnesses to come forward, as there is “great grassroots uncertainty” about how long RAMSI will remain and whether witnesses will face retribution.³⁴ Initially, the Solomon Islands’ courts were also under-equipped for hearing the numerous prosecutions, as were the prisons for holding the large number of persons awaiting trial.³⁵

Moreover, as the response to the April 2006 rioting illustrates, there are deficiencies in the RSIPF and PPF’s ability to prevent outbreaks of violence. This may in part be a consequence of claims that the PPF is “struggling to know how to relate to, let alone rebuild” the RSIPF.³⁶ It may also be in part due to Australia’s failure to send reinforcements to boost RAMSI’s security capabilities in anticipation of unrest arising from the election.³⁷ Indeed, it has been claimed that the breakdown of law and order following the election was “seriously damaging” to RAMSI.³⁸ However, law and order was quickly reinstated, and while the violence resulted in more than 600 Chinese people being displaced and up to 30 PPF officers being injured, it did not result in any fatalities. This indicates the improvements RAMSI has made to the overall security situation in Solomon Islands, particularly as a result of the removal of weapons from the community.

Therefore, while RAMSI has largely satisfied this test, its work is not yet done as security issues persist. RAMSI is now involved not only in the more difficult phase of prosecutions and the administration of justice, but also in dealing with ongoing tensions arising from the April 2006 election.

(B) HAS THE INTERVENTION SOUGHT TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE FIGHTING TOOK PLACE?

RAMSI has undertaken public consultation and has encouraged peace ceremonies and reconciliation, primarily through the National Peace Council.

³² ‘New rebel group says Solomons PM “too pro-Australian”’, *Radio Australia*, 10 May 2005;

‘Probe into threats on Solomons MPs’, *PNG Post Courier*, 1 June 2005.

³³ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom*, p. 175.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Mary-Louise O’Callaghan, ‘Solomons must decide if it really wants progress’, *The Australian*, 6 May 2006.

³⁷ Michael Fullilove, ‘Jigsaw that won’t fit’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 April 2006.

³⁸ Michael Fullilove quoted in David Crawshaw, ‘RAMSI force should have been bolstered: expert’, *Australian Associated Press General News*, 26 April 2006.

However, some of the root causes of the fighting, such as corruption, ethnic tension and land ownership are yet to be resolved. Indeed, Kabutaulaka notes that RAMSI has focused on “retributive justice” by making arrests, but notes that while “this is helpful in the short term...the process does not restore people’s relationships”.³⁹ Therefore, Moore argues that a “large-scale program of restorative or transformative justice” is required.⁴⁰ While RAMSI has thus satisfied the test of seeking to understand why the fighting took place, this understanding has not been translated into constructive actions to address these problems.

(c) HAS THE ECONOMY BEEN RESTORED?

The Solomon Islands’ government debt has been managed down, revenue compliance increased, and police, teachers and other public servants are being paid on time. Advisors are also working with the Solomon Islands’ government on an economic reform program to encourage investment. Finally, the Solomon Islands has begun steps towards private sector economic recovery, with an agreement to reopen a major gold mine by the end of 2006. Palm oil plantations on the Guadalcanal Plains have also been reestablished. Tourists have begun to return, with dive resorts and hotels being opened.

However, there has been criticism that economic improvements have not been felt by average Solomon Islanders. Indeed, many rural roads are still impassable due to lack of maintenance, and many essential services are in “disarray”, which is said to have reduced confidence in RAMSI and the government.⁴¹ Bishop Brown cites a “major disparity” between “RAMSI’s rhetoric” of “bringing peace and prosperity” and the

reality of...increasing poverty and unemployment, high school fees, a downward-spiraling economy, higher inflation and lower incomes, declining medical services...crumbling infrastructure...and so on.⁴²

Moreover, few locals have felt flow-on effects and the economic impact on Solomon Islanders’ standard of living has largely been indirect.⁴³ Indeed, in October 2005 the International Monetary Fund estimated that an annual growth rate of 4.5% will be required for the next 27 years in order for the Solomon Islands to achieve the living standards that they experienced prior to the conflict.⁴⁴

³⁹ Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka, “Failed State” and the War on Terror: Intervention in Solomon Islands’, *Asia Pacific Issues*, No. 72, March 2004, p. 6.

⁴⁰ Clive Moore, *Happy Isles in Crisis*, pp. 216-7.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 214.

⁴² Tony Brown, ‘RAMSI, the Police and the Future’, *Solomon Star*, 18 January 2005.

⁴³ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom*, p. 178.

⁴⁴ International Monetary Fund, Solomon Islands: 2005 Article IV Consultation – Staff Report; and Public Information Notice on the Executive Board Discussion, IMF country report No.

Therefore, while RAMSI appears to have satisfied this test at the level of government finances, the benefits have not been felt by average Solomon Islanders. It is critical that this occurs, as Kaldor cautions that a restored economy is the best way to prevent people falling back into old patterns of corruption and violence.

(D) HAS THE INTERVENTION INVOLVED MORE THAN A MILITARY RESPONSE?

RAMSI satisfies the fourth test as it is police-led, and the restoration of law and order was primarily a police, rather than military, task.⁴⁵ Around 300 police, including 200 Australians, were deployed to the Solomon Islands to remove weapons from the community and to “neutralize” the militias and criminal gangs. The military was deployed to provide logistical support and protection to the police and was quickly drawn down. It was, however, redeployed in response to the violence that followed the April 2006 election, with troop numbers swelling from 63 to 430 personnel.⁴⁶ While most of these troops have since left, at the time of writing up to 140 Australian troops remain in the Solomon Islands.⁴⁷

This indicates the importance of using “creative foreign policy tools” when engaging in interventions.⁴⁸ This is particularly relevant in the Southwest Pacific, where it was recognized that police, rather than the military, are better suited to addressing the security problems facing weak and failing states.⁴⁹

(E) HAS THE INTERVENTION GAINED AND SUSTAINED THE SUPPORT OF THE LOCAL POPULATION AND HAVE THERE BEEN VISIBLE CHANGES FOR THE BETTER?

RAMSI seemed to have satisfied this test during its first two phases. Indeed, numerous members of the Solomon Islands Parliament and community leaders have praised RAMSI. Moreover, with law and order and some government services and infrastructure restored, RAMSI also appeared to deliver visible changes for the better.

However, during its third phase support for RAMSI has waned. Some Members of Parliament have criticised RAMSI, and a Cabinet Committee report has recommended that RAMSI be wound back to its law and order

05/365, October 2005, <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2005/cr05365.pdf>>, p. 4. (Accessed 23 May 2006).

⁴⁵ Lieutenant Colonel John Hutcheson, ‘Helping a Friend: An Australian Military Commander’s Perspective on the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands’, *Australian Army Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2, p. 47.

⁴⁶ O’Callaghan, ‘Solomons must decide if it really wants progress’.

⁴⁷ ‘Solomons troops on way home’, *The Australian*, 25 May 2006.

⁴⁸ Wainwright, ‘How is RAMSI faring?’, p. 9.

⁴⁹ Benjamin Reilly and Elsin Wainwright, ‘The South Pacific’, in Chesterman et. al. (eds.), *Making States Work*, p. 140.

component.⁵⁰ Most significantly, recently appointed Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare has expressed a desire for “qualified and capable” Solomon Islanders to regain control over government ministries, particularly sensitive areas such as the Finance Ministry and RSIPF.⁵¹ Resentment of RAMSI is also more easily identifiable, primarily from Malaitans, and there are stories about harsh PPF tactics. Resentment has also arisen from the fact that RAMSI personnel have been granted legal immunity, and the legality of the Solomon Islands’ legislation endorsing RAMSI has been questioned. There is also concern that RAMSI will not stay long enough to complete its tasks, and that Solomon Islanders who have assisted RAMSI may be subject to traditional ‘payback’.

Moreover, the fact that a large number of RAMSI personnel have been placed in senior government positions has caused resentment among locals who feel left out of the reconstruction process. John Roughan has claimed that “disquiet comes from the feeling that this is not partnership”.⁵² In particular, there has been tension within the public service where RAMSI officers have taken line positions and advisory posts. There is also growing internal conflict and disputes over the authority of local and foreign decision makers.

Many Solomon Islanders have also been disappointed in how slowly visible changes for the better have come. One reporter notes that

while day-to-day movements have freed-up in the capital and people feel safer in the central districts after the intervention...in the outer, less well patrolled suburbs people continue to live lives fragmented by violence.⁵³

Moreover, “life for the average Solomon Islander continues as an unpalatable mix of reconciling with neighbors who not long ago might have wanted them dead, and struggling to find food to feed their families”.⁵⁴ Indeed, surveys conducted by Roughan indicate declining public support for RAMSI, with its public approval rating dropping from 88% six months after deployment, to 60% in April 2006.⁵⁵

In answer to RAMSI’s critics Nick Warner, former RAMSI Special Coordinator, notes that “the return of law and order has been so rapid, the opportunity to pick up the pieces of a normal life has come so fast, that many

⁵⁰ Indeed, in February 2005 three reports reviewing RAMSI’s first year in operation were debated in the Solomon Islands’ parliament, including the Review Report by the Intervention Taskforce Committee, the Cabinet Committee’s report on the Taskforce’s review, and the Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee Review Report.

⁵¹ Craig Skehan, ‘Aussies go home: new PM rocks the boat’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 May 2006.

⁵² Steve Sharp, ‘Aussie immunity snags PNG, Solomons initiatives’, *Pacific Islands Report*, 10 June 2005.

⁵³ Geoff Chambers, ‘Islands of discontent’, *The Gold Coast Bulletin*, 16 April 2005.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ ‘Mission: impossible?’, *New Zealand Herald*, 29 April 2006.

people are forgetting too quickly just how bad things were”.⁵⁶ Similarly, James Batley, current RAMSI Special Coordinator, notes that “partly because of its very success so far, RAMSI faces very high expectations from many parts of the Solomon Islands community”.⁵⁷ Warner argues that RAMSI’s critics intend to “provoke division and create tension amongst Solomon Islanders, in a rather cowardly attempt to drive a wedge between RAMSI and the people of Solomon Islands”. Moreover, Warner argues that criticism often comes from those who “benefited from the nation’s chaos” and who are “clearly not too keen to see order restored”.⁵⁸

Therefore, while RAMSI appeared to satisfy this test during its early phases, support for the intervention has waned. While this may in part be explained by claims that RAMSI has been a “victim of its own success” it is clear that deeper resentment exists which should be addressed as it may undermine RAMSI’s long-term effectiveness.

Applying Reconstructive Tests of Effectiveness to RAMSI

(A) HAS THE STATE BEEN STRENGTHENED?

So far RAMSI appears to satisfy this test, as the Solomon Islands state remains intact and is increasingly able to fulfil its end of the social contract through guaranteeing law and order and delivering more government services. However, several commentators are sceptical about RAMSI’s potential to strengthen the state in the long-term because of concern that it will not stay long enough to complete its tasks.⁵⁹ Moreover, as Australian personnel took over critical functions in the government and public service there is the concern that local self-government will not improve and that the Solomon Islands will not be able to sustain the current levels of peace and stability once RAMSI leaves.⁶⁰ The Central Bank of Solomon Islands Governor, Rick Hou, has foreshadowed that a culture of dependency may develop,⁶¹ as has already been illustrated by the common Solomon Islands’ saying “*weitim olketa RAMSI bae kam stretem*” (wait for RAMSI to come and fix it).⁶²

In addition, the appropriateness of reinforcing the Westminster model has been questioned. Henderson argues that “putting Solomon Islands back the

⁵⁶ Nick Warner, ‘Moving Forward in Partnership: Ramsi, One Year On’, speech at the Beyond Intervention Conference, Honiara, 15 June 2004.

⁵⁷ James Batley, ‘The Role of RAMSI in Solomon Islands: Rebuilding the State, Supporting Peace’, paper delivered at the Peace, Justice and Reconciliation Conference, Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 31 March-3 April 2005.

⁵⁸ Nick Warner, ‘Moving forward in partnership’, *Solomon Star*, 23 June 2004.

⁵⁹ See for example, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, ‘Australian Intervention in the Solomons: Beyond Operation Helpen Friend’, August 2003, <<http://www.oxfam.org.au/world/pacific/solomons/report.pdf>>. (Accessed 10 July 2005); Wainwright, How is RAMSI faring?, p. 4.

⁶⁰ Editorial: Looking beyond RAMSI’, *Solomon Star*, 17 June 2004.

⁶¹ ‘Beyond Intervention’ Workshop’, *Solomon Star*, 17 June 2004.

⁶² Kabutaulaka, “Failed State” and the War on Terror’, p. 2.

way it was before the 2000 uprising is not a 'solution'" as the "Westminster political system has not been able to cope with the demands of the fragmented societies of Melanesia". Instead, he says that the answer may be to create "a more decentralized federal structure linked together under a presidential system".⁶³ However, Hegarty et. al. note that while the weakness of the Solomon Islands' state has "been due in large part to institutional design and its lack of fit with local political cultures" they argue that "any design of new state institutions would face problems of 'fit'". Therefore, they conclude that "it is not feasible to abandon the Westminster model" but argue that there "is a need to develop linkages between local communities and the state".⁶⁴ While they note that there is widespread support for a move from a unitary to federal system, they argue that the reconstruction of the state must be approached with caution, lest it further entrenches ethnic divisions and leads resources to be spread too thinly.⁶⁵

This also raises larger questions about state and nation-building. Dinnen notes that while the centralised model which was inherited at independence is "deeply implicated" in the Solomon Islands' problems, the current proposals to establish a federal system have "serious flaws".⁶⁶ Moreover, commentators have argued that if the state-building task is to be a success it needs to be complemented by nation-building as Solomon Islands "lack[s] a sense of national identity".⁶⁷ This indicates that state-building is a long-term process, and RAMSI has proved that it is "more difficult for an international intervention to deal with the underlying problems that led to a failing or failed state".⁶⁸ Indeed, Reilly and Wainwright argue that Australia must make "an ongoing and increasing commitment" because "it makes little sense to devise an exit strategy from your own neighbourhood".⁶⁹

Therefore, as RAMSI moves into its reconstructive phase and RAMSI personnel begin to make the transition from doing jobs themselves to mentoring and skills transfer, the changes implemented need to be firmly entrenched so that the state remains strong once RAMSI has gone. Indeed, there is already fear about what will happen once RAMSI leaves, with a

⁶³ Jennifer Corrin Care, 'Off the peg' or 'made to measure': Is the Westminster system of government appropriate in Solomon Islands', *Alternative Law Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 5, 2002, p. 207.

⁶⁴ Hegarty et. al. *Rebuilding State and Nation in Solomon Islands*, p. 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Sinclair Dinnen, "Lending a Fist? Australia's New Interventionism in the Southwest Pacific", *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2004/5*, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2004, p. 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Derek McDougall, 'Intervention in Solomon Islands,' *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 374, p. 221.

⁶⁹ Reilly and Wainwright, 'The South Pacific', p. 140, citing Graeme Dobell, 'The South Pacific – Policy Taboos, Popular Amnesia and Political Failure', speech delivered at the Menzies Research Centre Lecture Series: Australian Security in the 21st Century, Canberra, 12 February 2003.

Solomon Star editorial asking: “are we Solomon Islanders capable of sustaining the current level of peace and stability, and improving on it when our friends leave us?”.⁷⁰

(B) HAS A LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT BEEN PUT IN PLACE?

One of the primary problems in Solomon Islands was corruption, which undermined the legitimacy of the government. RAMSI is therefore working to improve the machinery of government, improve accountability and transparency and build up anti-corruption institutions. The PPF-RSIPF Joint Corruption Targeting Task Force has also arrested several Solomon Islands Ministers and other senior figures.⁷¹

However, O’Callaghan has noted that “a growing body of Solomon Islanders are also concerned that RAMSI’s approach is not moving quickly enough against both the proponents and practice of corruption”.⁷² Indeed, Joses Tuhanku, the leader of the Opposition Labour Party, has commented that “if corruption is not tackled by RAMSI and by us as a nation, we may as well forget about any other plans or aspirations we might have”. This is because he argues that corruption is “the single most important factor behind what happened in this country”.⁷³ There has also been criticism that corruption investigations against former Prime Minister Kemakeza have not been pursued. Indeed, there has been growing pressure on RAMSI to investigate and arrest the “Big Fish”, who were the alleged “senior architects” of the crisis.⁷⁴ Tensions arising from this issue were part of the motivation for the riots that followed Rini’s appointment as Prime Minister, as he has been classified as one of those “Big Fish”.⁷⁵ While Sogavare has replaced Rini, allegations concerning his involvement in the ethnic tensions that precipitated RAMSI, as well as corruption, continue to shadow the government.⁷⁶

While RAMSI has been criticized for failing to act against Kemakeza, it was in a difficult position. As RAMSI is based on a minimal derogation of the Solomon Islands’ sovereignty, it is in the country at the invitation of the government – which could be withdrawn. Indeed, Wainwright and Reilly have noted that RAMSI is “vulnerable to changing political alignments within the parliament”.⁷⁷ However, Hegarty et. al. caution that by working with the Kemakeza government, RAMSI “r[a]n the risk of bestowing ‘false’ legitimacy

⁷⁰ ‘Editorial: Looking beyond RAMSI’, *Solomon Star*, 17 June 2004.

⁷¹ Wainwright, ‘How is RAMSI faring?’, p. 3.

⁷² Mary-Louise O’Callaghan, ‘One Year Later: Hard Lessons Learned for Solomon Islanders’, *Pacific Magazine*, August 2004.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ ‘RAMSI called on to catch ‘big fish’’, *PNG Post Courier*, 18 May 2005.

⁷⁵ Mark Van Beynen, ‘Solomons Sorrow’, *The Press*, 29 April 2006.

⁷⁶ Llyod Jones, ‘New Solomons PM a tricky task for Australia’, *Australian Associated Press General News*, 12 May 2006.

⁷⁷ Reilly and Wainwright, ‘The South Pacific’, p. 135.

on a government the popularity and integrity of which are contested”.⁷⁸ This issue continues to be relevant, as both Sogavare and his cabinet are also subject to corruption allegations, and has led O’Callaghan to question how RAMSI can “clean up bad governance without cleaning up the very government that invited [it] in?” She cautions that “by attempting to protect the perceived source of their political support”, RAMSI has “managed to undermine its actual source – the ordinary people of the Solomons”.⁷⁹

Therefore, it is questionable whether RAMSI satisfies this test. While the Solomon Islands’ government is legitimate to the extent that it was democratically elected, the fact that the problem of corruption – which corrodes its legitimacy – has not been properly dealt with suggests that RAMSI still has some way to go to satisfy this test. Indeed, there is the risk that if corruption is not dealt with, RAMSI-initiated reforms and development will be captured by those people who were responsible for corruption and disorder in the first place. Moreover, there is the associated risk that criminal and corrupting elements will simply wait RAMSI out.⁸⁰

(C) HAS LIBERAL DEMOCRACY BEEN ACHIEVED?

As the Solomon Islands was already governed by a democratically elected government (although elected following a coup), the challenge of achieving liberal democracy was less problematic for RAMSI. However, before RAMSI deployed the Solomon Islands’ government was failing to guarantee many aspects of a liberal democracy, as violence was widespread, an atmosphere of fear pervaded society and freedom of speech (particularly for the media) was limited. RAMSI has managed to change this atmosphere, the media is now able to operate freely and people are able to express their views. Following the arrival of RAMSI the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation started a “Talking Truth” program, which provides “a critical weekly forum for Islanders to express their views” about RAMSI. In particular, RAMSI personnel often appear on the program to answer questions and provide information. Controls on Solomon Islands’ newspapers have also freed up and “gone [are] the days of media intimidation”.⁸¹

(D) HAS LOCAL LEADERSHIP BEEN ENGAGED?

RAMSI seems to satisfy this test, primarily because it operates at the invitation of the Solomon Islands’ government. Indeed, Batley describes the guiding principles of RAMSI as: first, that RAMSI is a partnership between Solomon Islands and its neighbours; second, that RAMSI’s impact will not be

⁷⁸ Hegarty et. al. *Rebuilding State and Nation in Solomon Islands*, p. 14.

⁷⁹ Mary-Louise O’Callaghan, ‘Mission’s flaws lie exposed in the ruins’, *The Australian*, 21 April 2006.

⁸⁰ Hegarty et. al. *Rebuilding State and Nation in Solomon Islands*, p. 14.

⁸¹ Mary-Louise O’Callaghan, ‘Solomon Star squares up to angry mayor’, *The Australian*, 11 September 2003.

long lasting unless there is local ownership of change and reform; third, that capacity is central; and finally, that RAMSI is a long-term commitment.⁸²

However, the extent to which the Solomon Islands' government's invitation to Australia to lead RAMSI was voluntary, as well as the amount of power assumed by RAMSI personnel, has been questioned. In February 2005 Francis Zama, the then Minister for Finance and Treasury, commented that: "there were 'two governments'" operating in the Department of Finance, "one is Solomon Islands, the other is Australian".⁸³ Former Prime Minister Bart Ulufa'alu even discussed a no-confidence motion against former Prime Minister Kemakeza, although it was later withdrawn.⁸⁴ However, the extent to which this criticism comes from genuine concerns about RAMSI and not from personal reasons is debatable. Indeed, RAMSI has arrested four cabinet members on various charges, including former Foreign Minister Alex Bartlett and Police Minister Michael Mania. There have also been claims that some politicians want RAMSI investigations closed down because their own careers may be at risk.⁸⁵

In answer to these criticisms, Batley acknowledges the difficulty of building a "true partnership" between RAMSI and Solomon Islands, but argues that

if we don't make the attempt, we will be letting down the vast majority of Solomon Islanders who want to take advantage of the opportunity that RAMSI presents for Solomon Islanders themselves to rebuild their country.⁸⁶

Indeed, O'Callaghan calls on "senior, educated Solomon Islanders" to take up the responsibility of working with RAMSI "on behalf of those in the community who may not have the capacity to communicate their ideas effectively". She says that "the absence of these informed and constructive voices is the greatest weakness in the current approach, the blame for which cannot be laid at the feet of RAMSI".⁸⁷

Therefore, it is not clear whether RAMSI satisfies this test. While RAMSI's defenders claim that it intends to work with the local leadership, resentment amongst some Members of Parliament indicates that this may not always be the case. This indicates the importance of involving local leaders and actors in the reconstruction process, which is particularly relevant to the Southwest Pacific where the reconstruction of the state also involves a nation-building

⁸² James Batley, presentation to the Solomon Islands' government – Development Partners High Level Meetings, Honiara, 17-18 November 2004.

⁸³ Robert L. Iroga, 'Axed Solomons Minister Blames Australia', *Solomon Star*, 4 February 2004.

⁸⁴ Will Marshall, 'Further opposition to Australia's takeover in the Solomon Islands', 24 February 2005, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2005/feb2005/solo-f24_prn.shtml>. (Accessed 10 July 2005).

⁸⁵ 'Cabinet Ministers Call for RAMSI Reform', *Pacific News Agency Service*, 3 February 2005.

⁸⁶ Batley, 'The Role of RAMSI in Solomon Islands: Rebuilding the State, Supporting Peace'.

⁸⁷ Mary-Louise O'Callaghan, 'Australian foreign policy', *Solomon Star*, 21 June 2004.

process, and where ethnically and linguistically diverse people must work together to form a national identity.

(E) HAVE LOCAL FORCES BEEN ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS?

RAMSI has been criticized for failing to meet this final test. Indeed, Bishop Brown argues that RAMSI must change its relations with the general population or risk being seen “more and more as an occupying army and more anti-RAMSI incidents [like the sniper murder] will occur”.⁸⁸ Bishop Brown, who initially supported RAMSI, has become critical as he claims that it “does not seem very interested in the local people”, with RAMSI personnel not even allowed to buy food locally.⁸⁹ Similarly, John Roughan argues that churches, civil society, NGOs and women’s groups must be more involved to “act as the organizational underpinnings to reach out to the village, the backbone of island society” and play a key role in nation building.⁹⁰

With frens like these...

This article argues that while RAMSI appears to satisfy most tests of preventive intervention, it satisfies fewer tests of reconstructive intervention. On this basis, it can be concluded that to date RAMSI has been a success and that – at least in the short-term – intervention is an effective way to deal with the problems faced by Solomon Islands. Moreover, as RAMSI is an ongoing project many of its failings may still be rectified. However, given the rising criticism and resentment of RAMSI amongst some Solomon Islanders, and RAMSI’s failure to resolve corruption allegations which undermine the legitimacy of the government and motivated the riots that followed the April 2006 election, these failings should be addressed as they will affect RAMSI’s long-term reconstructive effectiveness.

Prior to RAMSI, Australia’s involvement in the UN intervention in East Timor was the most important example of Australian involvement in peacekeeping in the post-Cold War era. However, RAMSI represents another significant change in Australian policy towards the Southwest Pacific which has been described as “new interventionism”.⁹¹ Australia continues to be involved in Solomon Islands, PNG, Nauru, Fiji, Vanuatu and East Timor and it is important that the challenges faced by RAMSI, as well as the lessons learnt, be reflected in Australia’s future involvement in these states as well as others in the region which face instability. Indeed, RAMSI’s legitimacy – and short-term success – has led Henderson to argue that it is “likely to provide

⁸⁸ Tony Brown, ‘RAMSI, the Police and the Future’, *Solomon Star*, 18 January 2005.

⁸⁹ ‘Bishop: Solomons peace doomed’, *PNG Post Courier*, 20 January 2005.

⁹⁰ John Roughan, ‘RAMSI’s first 100 Days!’, *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Working Paper 2003/3*, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2003.

⁹¹ Dinnen, *Lending a Fist?* p. 1.

the precedent and 'model' for deciding on future interventions".⁹² This indicates that the discourse on "cooperative intervention" to address state failure has "created opportunities both for regional engagement and regional cooperation".⁹³ This new approach has already been implemented in respect of Nauru, which sought assistance from the Pacific Islands Forum under the Biketawa Declaration in 2004,⁹⁴ with Australia providing most of the finance and technical assistance for the rescue package. However, while Nauru requested support, this lesson may be less easy to apply to other states which face instability such as Vanuatu and Fiji, which have so far refused outside assistance.

Moreover, as the international community shifts towards embracing ideas of humanitarian intervention based on the 'responsibility to protect' and intervention to prevent state failure, it is important that the tests identified in this article be applied to future interventions in order to analyse their effectiveness. While it is acknowledged that it is impossible to make "grand claims" about the applicability of RAMSI to other interventions,⁹⁵ as RAMSI has so far been a success the international community should learn lessons from the way it has been conducted and take heed of the challenges that it faces.

However, ultimately it is preferable that interventions – regardless of how 'cooperative' – do not take place. To that end, while this article supports the effectiveness of RAMSI to date, it argues that it would be preferable if Southwest Pacific states were provided with less intrusive assistance before they face instability of the kind experienced by Solomon Islands. Australia has already begun to do this and the 'Fragile States Initiative' outlined in the 2005 Australian Budget is another positive move. But Australia needs to go further, particularly in respect of states like PNG, Vanuatu and Fiji – otherwise it may be faced with a region full of 'helpem frens' in need.

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⁹² John Henderson, 'Oceania and the New Security Agenda', in Derek McDougall and Peter Shearman (eds.), *Australian Security after 9/11: New and Old Agendas*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005.

⁹³ Reilly and Wainwright, 'The South Pacific', p. 139.

⁹⁴ 'Forum Communiqué', Press Statement, Thirty-Fifth Pacific Islands Forum, 5-7 August 2004, Apia, Samoa, <http://www.forumsec.org.fj/news/2004/August/Aug_09.htm>. (Accessed 10 July 2005).

⁹⁵ Michael Fullilove, 'The Testament of Solomons: RAMSI and International State-Building', *Lowy Institute Analysis*, Lowy Institute for International Policy, March 2006, p. 4.