Creating a Perfect Storm: is RAMSI reproducing conditions ripe for violence in the Solomon Islands?

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Politics and International Studies at Murdoch University, 2012
I declare that this thesis is my own work, unless otherwise indicated.

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Lian Sinclair
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Abstract

The 'common sense' view of Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific is that it is aimed at securing a stable and friendly near neighbourhood for Australia. Contrary to this view, this thesis argues that Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific is based upon an ideology of institutional neo-liberalism and is therefore mostly concerned with transforming governance structures within and around states in line with neo-liberal models of statehood. The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) is an Australian-led intervention and state-building initiative designed in response to the violence experienced in the Solomon Islands from 1998 to 2001 and the following years of state bankruptcy and criminality that plagued the South Pacific state. RAMSI has been commonly represented as a success story of international interventionism and state-building, however, I will argue that this representation is seriously flawed because of fundamental oversights in two key aspects of the intervention, caused by RAMSI’s ideological underpinnings. Firstly, causes of instability and violence in the Solomon Islands are reduced to ethnic conflict, poor governance and slow economic growth, while political and historical causes are ignored or seen as secondary. Therefore the central 'solutions' to the 'failure' of the state revolve around the implementation of 'good governance' and private sector led economic growth, whilst long standing grievances are ignored. Secondly, RAMSI is replicating, or even exacerbating, many of the same political-economic conditions that led to the violent conflict to which it is responding. The implications of this argument are that Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific is actually undermining its stated objective of promoting stability.
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