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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Introduction: From an 'Arc of Instability' to a Perfect Storm

Australia’s relations with the South Pacific are usually framed by perceptions of the latter as an ‘arc of instability’, consisting of a varying collection of states to the north and north-east of Australia that are considered ‘fragile’ or ‘failed’ states. According to current orthodoxy, state fragility is a function of poor governance and unstable economic development. Poor governance, in turn is defined by the lack of neo-liberal governance institutions. State fragility is seen to threaten the emergence of many non-traditional threats to Australia’s security including: transnational crime, money laundering, drugs, the illegal arms trade, disease, terrorism and refugees. These perceived threats and the prevention of state failure has been the Australian government’s rationale for a new regional focus in the South Pacific. The response from successive Australian governments has been to focus on strengthening governance by building local and regional regulatory institutions, with the aim of improving economic growth – an agenda that has been called ‘institutional neo-liberalism’. Other discourses have also shaped policy priorities, such as historical ties, geopolitical exclusion and a sense of Australia’s regional responsibilities in the global ‘war on terror’. These converging discourses tend to rely on over-simplified and generalised notions of the causes of so-called ‘fragile’ or ‘failed’ states in the South Pacific. However, when considered individually, cases of instability are shown to be the result of specific historical and political developments.

By ignoring the root causes of instability, Australian foreign policy becomes unable to achieve its stated objectives. Instead, it is facilitating processes of primitive

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1 Also referred to as ‘Socio-Institutional Neo-liberalism’ by some authors, see: Toby Carroll & Shahar Hameiri. ‘Good governance and security: The limits of Australia’s New Aid Programme’ Journal of Contemporary Asia 37, No.4 (2007):410-30, p.413
accumulation and creating a new Australian hegemony in the region, reversing the trend of decolonisation under way since the 1960s. The Australian Government could instead help achieve stability, security and poverty reduction in the South Pacific by working with various state and non-state actors on the specific, localised and historic causes of conflict and instability.

A small scale civil war, commonly referred to as 'the tensions' broke out in the Solomon Islands in 1998, tens of thousands of people were forced to flee their homes while hundreds were killed. From 1998-2001 the tensions largely took the form of Militants from Guadalcanal, under the banners of the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) and Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA), attempting to expel Malaitan 'migrants' and demand compensation from the government. A rival Malaitan militia, the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) formed to combat the Guale militants and also demand compensation from the government. This period culminated in the MEF backed coup in June 2001 followed by the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement in October 2001. From the signing of the Townsville Peace Agreement to the arrival of The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003, the political situation was comprised less by organised militants fighting each other and more by armed gangs demanding money from anyone they could, particularly the government, which was brought to the brink of bankruptcy.

RAMSI was initially designed as a three step intervention. Firstly, military and police forces were sent to restore 'law and order', arrest militants and recover weapons; secondly, efforts were made to stabilise government finances; and finally, a long term program of capacity building and governance reform was enacted. RAMSI was projected to last ten years or more, it is currently in its ninth year with no end in sight. RAMSI presents an informative case study of the directions and limitations of Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific region, because it represents the largest commitment
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of Australian resources to a single project in the region and typifies its institutional neo-liberal approach.

The first chapter of this thesis will review the literature on Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific and suggest that the contemporary debate largely takes Australian foreign policy at face value and fails to critically analyse the ideological drivers and implications of various policies. I look to accounts of institutional neo-liberalism and regulatory regionalism in order to contextualise and critique Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific. I will then introduce RAMSI as a case study in Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific and review the main criticisms that have been made of it.

The second chapter explores the philosophy and structure of RAMSI and suggests that there are serious inconsistencies between RAMSI's agenda and actual social and political-economic conditions in the Solomon Islands. RAMSI's almost exclusive focus on law and order, good governance and capacity building is shown to be motivated primarily by a securitisation of ‘poor governance’, understood in a particular and narrow manner. The notion of ‘good governance’ is stripped of its apolitical veneer to reveal an ideology specifically supportive of private capital and illiberal governance practices. Capacity building is then shown to be a highly lopsided reform program that supports and empowers institutions that are designed to create and promote neo-liberal markets. I will then analyse the structure and functions of RAMSI and argue that the good governance reforms advanced by RAMSI are attempting to transform the Solomon Islands state into a state approximating an ideal-typical neo-liberal model.
Chapter three turns to consider the historical context of conflict in the Solomon Islands, in order to answer the question: what impact is RAMSI having on stability in the Solomon Islands? There has been a long history of struggles over governance structures in the Solomon Islands and brief accounts of some of these will be provided. Both before and after independence, various social movements organised around land rights, equitable development, recognition of traditional forms of governance, and devolution of political power. The groups of militants that started the conflict in 1998 advanced demands on the government that are strikingly similar to these earlier social movements. In contrast, RAMSI and Australian policy makers have blamed the conflict on 'poor governance' and 'ethnic tension'. The argument is then made that RAMSI's neo-liberal framing has led to the reinterpretation of conflict in order to pursue a predetermined programme of institutional neo-liberalism.

Finally, chapter four will consider some key issues of the political economy in the Solomon Islands, which highlight concerns that RAMSI, through its neo-liberal reform agenda, is actually perpetuating instability in the Solomon Islands. An aid bubble has been created in Honiara as expatriates working for RAMSI and other agencies fuel an inflationary economy which both deepens structural inequality and centralises political power. Logging is the largest industry in the Solomon Islands and has been mostly responsible for recent economic growth; however it is dangerously unsustainable and without suitable regulation will collapse within the next five years. The political economy of land rights and development, issues which were largely responsible for the outbreak of tensions and have subsequently been ignored by RAMSI. Significant tension between traditional and modern understandings of land rights remains, as does significant discontent about continued inequitable development. Such tension and discontent, left un-addressed, could potentially erupt into renewed conflict.
The picture that is painted in this thesis comes close to a perfect storm. While RAMSI is currently presiding over high economic growth in the Solomon Islands, this growth is almost totally unsustainable. Meanwhile, most of the root causes of conflict, particularly disputes over land rights, inequitable development, the centralisation of political power, and continued subordination of traditional forms of governance have not been resolved. Furthermore, RAMSI is actually facilitating a further centralisation of political power, inequitable development practices, and the subordination of custom to Western forms of governance. Seen in the historical context outlined in chapter three, this is an almost perfect replication of the conditions in 1998 that lead to the outbreak of violent conflict. Neo-liberalism as a hegemonic ideology in the state-building context forbids consideration of particular grievances and desired outcomes and so plays a severely limiting role in the design of Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific.

The Tongan academic, Epile Haou'ofa, passionately argues that:

> for the purpose of attaining and maintaining cultural autonomy and resisting continuing encroachments on and domination of our lives by the global forces aided and abetted by comprador institutions […] we must clear the stage and bring in new characters. We must bring to centre stage, as main players, our own peoples and institutions.²

Indeed, neo-liberalism is the latest in a long line of orientalist theories which freeze, homogenise, and belittle (post)colonial subjects and thereby legitimise the subordination of populations to objective 'rational' theories. Following this, I argue that neo-liberal ideological framings of the region must be abandoned in favour of a stance of decolonisation, which would address the particular historical causes of conflict and instability rather than replicate them. This would inevitably involve empowering local people to seize control over their own destinies.

² Epeli Hau'ofa 'Pasts to Remember' in *We are the Ocean*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2008, 60-79, pp63-65
1. Australian Foreign Policy in the South Pacific and the RAMSI

Introduction

This chapter provides the framework and context necessary for my thesis. I will start by briefly reviewing the literature on Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific. There is broad agreement that in the post-September 11 world, Australian foreign policy is driven mainly by security concerns; in the South Pacific this manifests in the discourse about the 'arc of instability'. The common denominator of all aspects of Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific is that they are driven by an agenda of managing perceived security risks, seen to be associated with poor governance in regional states. Critical appraisals of the 'arc of instability' metaphor suggest that it is an overly narrow perspective that prevents Australia from engaging with the full complexity of issues faced in the South Pacific. I then introduce a historical materialist account of neo-liberalism and the related programme of institutional neo-liberalism, situating Australian foreign policy within them. Indeed, neo-liberalism is argued to be the hegemonic ideology driving Australian foreign policy-making. Building on this, regulatory regionalism is defined as a dispositif or technique of governance that avoids direct control, yet manages perceived potential risks through transforming domestic and regional governance structures. This is a useful way of examining the governance structures associated with Australian foreign policy.

I will then introduce RAMSI as a prominent example of Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific. RAMSI is commonly represented as a success story of international intervention and state-building, and most of the criticism that has been levelled at RAMSI focuses on particular negative effects of intervention that could
1. Australian Foreign Policy in the South Pacific and the RAMSI

presumably be fixed through improved delivery and coordination. The literature concerning
RAMSI, unlike the broader discourse on foreign policy in the South Pacific, offers a more diverse
range of criticism, including some authors who systematically analyse the links between the drivers,
ideology and effects of RAMSI.

The 'Arc of Instability' in the Policy-Makers Imagination

In the majority of the literature, Australian foreign policy is seen to have changed significantly
following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US and the Bali bombings. It is common for
analysts to argue that the Howard government largely neglected the foreign policy realm prior to
2001. The major impacts of the terrorist attacks for Australian foreign policy was to cement
Australia into the US alliance and the ‘war on terror’, and focus foreign policy sharply on the issues
of terrorism and security while elevating the status of foreign policy within the Australian
government. Hirst describes how Australian strategic thinking has changed in the post September
11 world: “The terrorist attacks on the US opened up a ‘pandora’s box’ of strategic policy issues in
Australia” and “prompt[ed] a new array of sweeping accounts, or meta-narratives, describing the
key features of the contemporary international security environment.”

It is also common for analysts to view more continuity than change between the governments of Howard, Rudd and
Gillard, especially in respect to the predominance of security perspectives in foreign policy.

It is worth noting the perceived success of Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific. Cotton and
Ravenhill, argue that despite the increased status following 2001, foreign policy under Howard had

1 James Cotton & John Ravenhill. 'Trading on alliance security: Foreign Policy in the post-11 September era' in
Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2007
2 Christian Hirst. 'The Paradigm Shift: 11 September and Australia's Strategic reformation', Australian Journal of
International Affairs 61, no.2 (2007): 175-192, p.141
3 Christian Hirst. 'The Paradigm Shift: 11 September and Australia's Strategic reformation', p.177-178
4 For example see James Cotton & John Ravenhill. 'Middle Power Dreaming: Australian Foreign Policy during the
Rudd-Gillard Governments' in Middle Power Dreaming: Australia in World Affairs 2006-2010, edited by James
Cotton & John Ravenhill, 1-12, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2011
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little to boast about, except that: “arguably, the two major successes have been relations with China and with the Pacific Islands.” This view, that relations with the Pacific Islands improved after 2001, is almost ubiquitous amongst commentators. To be sure, perceptions of the region have changed in Australian policy makers’ imagination and involvement in the region has increased dramatically. Interventions by the Australian Defence Force and/or Australian Federal Police have occurred in at least five Pacific Island states – The Solomon Islands, PNG, Nauru, Timor Leste and Tonga. Australian foreign aid was doubled from 2004 to 2010 while becoming more focused and conditional. The Howard government increased its involvement in the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and through this began implementation of the Pacific Plan. It is problematic that most authors see this increased involvement as an improvement, without further analysis.

Much of the literature about Australian foreign policy in the Pacific is concerned with explaining the post-2001 shift towards a more interventionist disposition. Here, two narratives are popular in the literature: changing global attitudes in the 'age of terror' and 'state failure' in the Pacific. O'Keefe has argued:

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5 James Cotton & John Ravenhill, 'Trading on alliance security', p.15
7 The 2006 AusAid white paper outlined four main themes for Australian aid in the Pacific: accelerating economic growth; fostering effective states; investing in people; and promoting regional stability and cooperation. This represents a move away from the ‘unconditional’ aid that characterised the cold war period, to a focus on building an institutional and regulatory environment where the private sector can grow. AusAID. Australian Aid: Promoting Growth and Stability - White Paper on the Australian Government's overseas aid program, Canberra, 2006
8 The PIF is the primary regional organisation in the South Pacific where Pacific leaders plan regional initiatives, however it is compromised by low levels of funding and the sources of its funding. Australia and New Zealand provide the largest share of funding to the PIF and are able to determine the agenda and outcomes of most forum meetings.
9 The Pacific Plan aims to “enhance and stimulate economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security for Pacific countries” through training, mentoring, offering secondments to public officials and embedding mostly Australian officials in government departments of Pacific Island states. Shahar Hameiri. 'The region within: RAMSI, the Pacific Plan and new modes of Governance in the Southwest Pacific' Australian Journal of International Affairs 63, no.3 (2009): 348-360 p.349
1. Australian Foreign Policy in the South Pacific and the RAMSI

The 'war on terror' opened up the political space in which increased intervention in the South Pacific could be undertaken, but events within the region itself were the central factor contributing to intervention.\(^{10}\)

Hirst has similarly argued that:

> Recognising the threat posed by weak and failing states following Afghanistan's role in the 9/11 attacks, the Howard government decided to take a more robust and interventionist approach to dealing with state weakness in the South Pacific.\(^{11}\)

Both authors also stress that increased Australian involvement in the South Pacific is not merely a case of acting as a 'deputy sheriff' for the USA, rather it is centred on 'Australian interests' and the strategic denial of other powers in the region. In short, we have seen an evolution in thinking about the South Pacific from a region in danger of 'falling off the map'\(^{12}\) to one full of security threats and risks needing to be managed.

In Australia, the important meta-narrative about the South Pacific is the 'arc of instability' concept. 'Weak' and 'failed' states from Timor-Leste to Tonga are viewed as threats to stability in the region and to Australian security because unstable economic and political conditions and poor governance allow, or fail to prevent, non-traditional security threats emerging or expanding in the region. Reilly, with his influential 'Africanisation' hypothesis, was one of the first to suggest that the South Pacific as a whole, led by events in the Solomon Islands and Fiji, had "changed from an 'oasis of democracy' to an 'arc of instability'."\(^{13}\) While he never extrapolates instability in the Pacific to security threats to Australia, the picture painted of the South Pacific, and the Solomon Islands in particular, is of a region plagued by militarism, weak governments and ethnic conflict.

\(^{11}\) Christian Hirst. 'Foresight or Folly? RAMSI and Australia's post 9/11 South Pacific policies' in Australian Foreign Policy in the Age of Terror, edited by Carl John Ungerer, 227-250, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008
\(^{12}\) Greg Fry. 'Framing the Islands: Knowledge and Power in Changing Australian Images of "the South Pacific" The Contemporary Pacific 9, no.2 (1997): 305-344
\(^{13}\) Ben Reilly. 'The Africanisation of the South Pacific' Australian Journal of International Affairs 54, no.3 (2000): 261-268, p.262
Ayson has provided a critical history of the idea of an 'arc of instability' and its politicisation. He argues that during John Howard's term as Prime Minister, the Labor party used the concept to influence Australian strategic policy, which they saw as having too much emphasis on Islamic terrorism and the Middle-East and not enough on Australia's immediate neighbourhood. It is important to note that the ‘arc of instability’ is not a fixed constellation but has taken on various configurations of states at different times as the internal politics of Australia’s northern and northeast neighbours changes in the imagination of Australian policy-makers. Ayson concludes that the two main utilities of the 'arc of instability' concept are strategic and political, rather than descriptive or explanatory:

It is one thing for Australian decision makers to know that East Timor, PNG or Solomon Islands are each facing serious internal challenges to their individual stabilities. It is another to know that Australia is located next to an ‘arc of instability’ which covers all of them. The metaphor implies something systemic which goes beyond the individual crises of particular neighbours.

The concept continues to hold significant purchase. The 2009 Defence White Paper identifies Australia's second most important security objective, behind the ability to defend the Australian continent directly, as the “security, stability and cohesion of our immediate neighbourhood” and the continued likely “economic stagnation and political and social instability” caused by “weak governance, crime and social challenges” in South Pacific island states.

More critical appraisals of the 'arc of instability' as a political concept are provided by several authors. In Fraenkel's rebuttal of Ben Reilly’s 'Africanisation' thesis he points out that: “Some Melanesian states face serious underlying tensions, but political crises tend to be localised, episodic
and obedient to very specific historical causes".\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, according to Fraenkel, the 'arc of instability' framework conceals the specific causes of instability and limits Australia's ability to effectively engage in the South Pacific. Reilly, along with most politicians and popular media, has been content to fall back on homogenised notions of the South Pacific as an inherently unstable region – thereby reducing views of conflict in the Solomon Islands to “an ethnic civil war between rival ethnic militias.”\textsuperscript{21} Kabutaulaka characterises accounts such as Reilly's as “lazy shorthand explanation(s) that divorce the crisis from contemporary socio-economic contexts.”\textsuperscript{22} Kabutaulaka uses an analysis of political economy to dig beneath the 'ethnic' surface, arguing that a deeper factor underlying the 'ethnic' tension, in the Solomon Islands at least, is uneven development patterns. Similarly, Liloqula and Pollard argue that the underlying causes of conflict are: the “exploitative use of natural resources and inequitable sharing of benefits”; “migration, population pressure and uneven development”; “successive failure of government policy and strategies”; and “lack of national unity”. These causes are placed within a historical narrative of centralisation of services and governance.\textsuperscript{23}

McDougall explains well how the securitisation of a region, or even specific situations, can be reductionist, which leads to important factors being ignored:

To think of these two conflicts [the Bougainville civil war and the Solomon Islands ‘tensions’] primarily in terms of security perspectives could lead to over-simplification. The analytical task is to unearth the sources and dynamics of conflict in these islands. […] Focusing on security draws attention to the element of threat in situations. However, that focus should not obscure the nature of the broader political context. The conflicts in Bougainville and Solomon Islands have certainly been threatening in various respects, but these threats have arisen out of certain political contexts. In responding to these conflicts, it is necessary to have a broadly political

\textsuperscript{21} Ben Riley. 'The Africanisation of the South Pacific', p.262
\textsuperscript{22} Tarcisius T. Kabutaulaka. 'Beyond Ethnicity: the political economy of the Guadacanal crisis in the Solomon Islands' \textit{State Society and Governance in Melanesia Project Working Paper} 01/1, 2001, Available at: \url{https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/41949}
\textsuperscript{23} Ruth Liloqula & Alice A. Pollard. 'Understanding Conflict in the Solomon Islands: a Practical Means to Peacemaking' \textit{State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper} 7, Australian National University, 2000
approach, rather than being unduly influenced by the responses that might normally be suggested by securitization.\textsuperscript{24}

If Australia's foreign policy in the South Pacific has been driven by an over-simplified security framework, the question of alternatives is necessarily raised. The alternative, as McDougall suggests, is to unearth the root causes of conflict and instability. To be sure, instability in the South Pacific is nothing new, nor are Australian “perceptions of their place in the world that they are isolated in a hostile corner, far from friends and close to potential trouble.”\textsuperscript{25} What is new is the way in which this discourse has simplified causes of instability and linked with global narratives in the post-September 11 world.

A second relevant and converging motive for increased Australian involvement in the Pacific, raised by some authors, is the strategic denial of other external powers. Firth argues that increased involvement in the Pacific from China, Taiwan, the US and the United Arab Emirates, along with traditional colonial powers could threaten Australian interests in the region and drive increased involvement from Australia.\textsuperscript{26} Containment of the Soviet Union during the cold war was motivation for a quadrupling of Australian aid to the Pacific,\textsuperscript{27} and today China is seen by many to represent the biggest threat to the USA’s hegemonic status in the Asia-Pacific and Australian hegemony in the South Pacific.\textsuperscript{28} Although no author goes so far as to argue that the idea of containing China is a primary driver for increased Australian involvement in the Pacific, it reinforces the discourses about fragile states that might be vulnerable to ‘chequebook diplomacy’ that does not coincide with Australian 'interests'. Australia is seen to be sensitive to other powers operating in the South Pacific because of its long history of involvement in the Pacific. Prime Minister Deakin persuaded the


\textsuperscript{27} Greg Fry. 'Regionalism and International Politics of the South Pacific' \textit{Pacific Affairs} 54, no.3 (1981): 455-84, pp.480-481

\textsuperscript{28} Michael O'Keefe. 'Australia and fragile states in the Pacific'
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British government to colonise the Solomon Islands in 1893, Australia administered Papua New Guinea under a League of Nations Mandate from World War I until independence in 1975 and important battles were fought across the Pacific in World War II, giving a sense of shared history through struggle. Because of this history, as well as geography, the South Pacific is often viewed as Australia’s global responsibility. What is important about the literature on strategic denial is how well it fits with and supports the more dominant motivations of instability and security.

Neo-liberalism in Australian foreign policy

In order to account for the development and direction of Australian foreign policy, it is not enough to simply note the inadequacy of the ‘arc of instability’ metaphor, we must interrogate its ideological foundation. In this section, I provide a definition and history of neo-liberalism and situate Australian foreign policy within that tradition.

Neo-liberalism is primarily an ideology, one that has become hegemonic since the 1980s in almost all fields of politics and economics, indeed in “the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.” Harvey provides a baseline definition for neo-liberalism:

Neo-liberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices.

As a normative meta-theory, neo-liberalism differs from other forms of capitalism in that it informs political-economic frameworks regardless of the instrumental value of such frameworks in particular instances. It can thus justify the kind of spending required for RAMSI despite no apparent

31 David Harvey. A Brief History of Neoliberalism, p.2
potential of any kind of return on investment. It is neo-liberalism's normative character that also
allows it to be applied to a broad range of traditionally non-economic disciplines.

In the international system, neo-liberalism emerged in the 1980s as the so called Washington
Consensus, characterised most famously by the 'shock therapy' and structural adjustment programs
implemented by the IMF that promoted policies of deregulation, trade liberalisation and budgetary
austerity. Following the end of the Cold War and several crises in global capitalism during the
1980s and 1990s, a post-Washington Consensus began to emerge that emphasised building
institutions that regulate economic and financial flows in order to sustain and expand markets, as
opposed to the Washington Consensus' focus on de-regulation and naked free markets.\(^{32}\) Peck and
Tickell trace the evolution of neo-liberalism, while bearing in mind the highly variegated and
localised versions of neo-liberalism, through its 'roll back' phase to the modern 'roll out' phase or
'institutional neo-liberalism'.

No longer concerned narrowly with the mobilization and extension of markets (and market
logics), neoliberalism is increasingly associated with the political foregrounding of new modes
of “social” and penal policy making, concerned specifically with the aggressive reregulation,
disciplining, and containment of those marginalized or dispossessed by the neoliberalization of
the 1980s.\(^{33}\)

The role of the state in this theory is to mitigate risks to capital and markets, often by shifting risk
onto communities, the environment and people. Furthermore, because the functions of the state are
pre-determined, this entails that decision-making becomes increasingly insulated from popular
influence and democratic institutions, which might stray from the path of neo-liberal reform;
instead, neo-liberals favour governance by experts and elites.\(^{34}\)

York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2010


\(^{34}\) David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p.66
Australian foreign policy in the Pacific and RAMSI in particular can be located within the newer practice of institutional neo-liberalism because of the focus and resources dedicated to state-building, good governance, risk management, institutions and regulation. However, it is perceived security concerns and related risk management strategies that drive neo-liberalisation in the South Pacific, rather than a narrow concern with extending markets. The logic is that stable states need strong institutional and regulatory environments to encourage the private sector growth that prevents security threats from arising within their borders.\(^{35}\) This merging of neo-liberal development and security policy amounts to a 'securitisation' of dynamic political issues. Political and ideological disagreements are imagined as threats to security, criminalised and delegitimised.

Rosser has provided an account of neo-liberalism in Australian aid policy, which can be tentatively applied to Australian foreign policy with respect to the South Pacific, where aid and development are the primary mechanisms of foreign policy. For Rosser, there are two factors that have led to the prevalence, indeed hegemony, of neo-liberalism over the main contending ideology in aid policy, social justice. The first is the power of business interests in a capitalist state. Even though foreign policy and aid policy are not high priorities on the reform agenda of the business communities, they still mobilise more resources than the NGOs that advocate social justice frameworks. The business community is also more disposed to work through the state while development NGOs tend to work alongside, independent of the state or in collaboration with international and multilateral organisations.\(^{36}\) The second factor is the institutional structure of foreign policy decision making, which is concentrated in the executive arm of government and accordingly insulated from public scrutiny, debate and influence.\(^{37}\) One primary mechanism by which AusAID promotes neo-

\(^{35}\) Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell. 'Neoliberalising Space'

\(^{36}\) Andrew Rosser. 'Neo-liberalism and the politics of Australian aid policy-making' *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 63, no.3 (2008): 372-385, p.378

\(^{37}\) Andrew Rosser. 'Neo-liberalism and the politics of Australian aid policy-making', p. 379
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liberalisation in its projects is through its risk management strategies. Rosser and Wanner have provided an analysis of the ways in which risk management strategies employed by AusAID are focused on managing risks to the reputations of AusAID and the Australian government rather than the risks faced by poor people in developing countries. Their central argument is that neo-liberalisation, especially privatisation and marketisation, shift risks from the agencies, governments and capital onto poor people, who may find themselves unable to access basic needs in a market economy therefore they conclude that: “risk management is strongly related to both the construction of liberal market-based societies and the pursuit of the Australian government's foreign policy objectives.”38 While the literature on AusAID here is illuminating, there is a gap in the literature concerning the ideology behind Australian foreign policy more generally. One would expect to find similar patterns occurring within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for example, yet the research remains to be done. A related concept that begins to address this gap is 'regulatory regionalism'.

Regulatory Regionalism in the South Pacific

What is unique about Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific and especially RAMSI is the extent to which it emphasises state building and development and is integrated into a broader regional interlinked security and development agenda.39 Several authors have coined the term 'regulatory regionalism' in order to describe a collection of related phenomena, all of which see regional governance becoming embedded within national and sub-national level governance. Jayasuriya locates RAMSI within a framework of “new modes of regional governance”40 as distinct from the more traditional multi-lateral organisations such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

40 Kanishka Jayasuriya. 'Regulatory Regionalism in the Asia Pacific: drivers, instruments and actors' Australian Journal of International Relations 63, no.3 (2009): 335-347, p.335
1. Australian Foreign Policy in the South Pacific and the RAMSI (APEC). Regulatory regionalism is also distinct from forms of direct governance that might be reminiscent of colonialism, which the Australian government has neither the appetite or motivation for, preferring 'arm’s length' mechanisms designed to regulate governance according to neo-liberal principles. These new modes of regional governance are formed by networks of policy experts, largely drawn from the private sector, and prioritise the 'harmonisation of national policy' and cooperation of policy makers. The important characteristic of these phenomena is that rather than facilitating cooperation between states, states themselves are being transformed and regulated from the inside and from the outside, while various prerogatives of state power are being transferred to the private sector and new or remodelled national institutions.\textsuperscript{41} Jayasuriya observes that the “increasing regionalisation of economic and social activity allows political actors to move issues and conflicts into a regional level.”\textsuperscript{42} In practice, this means that national level decision-making becomes more accountable to transnational institutions such as RAMSI and the Pacific Islands Forum or to abstracted notions of good governance and neo-liberalism, and less accountable to the public or parliament.

Regulatory regionalism might appear similar to the Foucaultian concept of governmentality – both provide an account of how a collection of 'arm's length' mechanisms, or political technologies produce particular forms of governance conducive to market societies. Regulatory regionalism, however, focuses more on the institutional structure within a region, emphasising the role of mechanisms such as 'capacity-building', aid flows, regional cooperation, and harmonisation of policy. I find this account most convincing in accounting for how neo-liberal practices are exported from Australia to island states in the South Pacific.

\textsuperscript{41} Shahr Hameiri. 'The region within', p.349
\textsuperscript{42} Kanishka Jayasuriya. 'Regulatory regionalism in the Asia-Pacific'
Solomon Islands in the Arc of Instability

There is almost unanimous agreement in the literature that the Australian government was motivated to lead RAMSI because of perceived potential security threats emanating from the Solomon Islands. The 'arc of instability' metaphor was applied directly to the Solomon Islands when the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) released the *Our Failing Neighbour* report, which stated that the Solomon Islands risked becoming “a petri dish in which transnational and non-state security threats can develop and breed.”\(^{43}\) These threats were said to include: “drug smuggling, gun-running, identity fraud and people smuggling, for example. Perhaps even terrorism.”\(^{44}\) This language was almost immediately adopted by then Prime Minister Howard and Foreign Minister Downer, as the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was planned and implemented in 2003. An interesting point to note is that all the threats cited as originating in the Solomon Islands were *hypothetical* risks. Following the work of Aradau and Van Munster who define risk as “a modality of governing and ordering reality, which implies the creation of complex technologies as well as political rationalities,”\(^{45}\) the question becomes “one of taming the infinities of risk and incorporating it within a dispositif of governance.”\(^{46}\) Through this lens, RAMSI can be viewed as an exercise in precautionary governance through risk.

Contrary to ASPI's framing of the situation, Kabutaulaka places RAMSI directly within the broader changing framework of Australian foreign policy and global security discourse: “Australia's willingness to lead the Pacific Islands Forum regional intervention into the Solomon Islands cannot be understood by looking at what happened in the Solomon Islands alone.”\(^{47}\) In the context of the

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\(^{43}\) Elsina Wainwright. *Our Failing Neighbour*, Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2001, p.13

\(^{44}\) Elsina Wainwright. *Our Failing Neighbour*, p.14


\(^{46}\) Claudia Aradau & Rens Van Munster. 'Governing Terrorism Through Risk', p.100

\(^{47}\) Tarcisius T. Kabutaulaka. 'Australian Foreign Policy and the RAMSI intervention' *Contemporary Pacific* 17, no.2 (2005): 283-310, p.302
literature examined above, it is plausible that RAMSI was designed as a piece of the jigsaw of Anglo-American global security rather than an appropriate response to local conflict in the Solomon Islands.

**Evaluating and Analysing RAMSI**

There is near unanimous agreement in the literature that RAMSI has been successful in its initial task of restoring security and disarming militants. Moore demonstrates this view, citing that during the first twelve months of the intervention over 3,500 weapons were handed in to authorities and conflict, except for some small pockets, had ceased.\(^48\) Beyond this agreement, there are a variety of approaches to analysing RAMSI. These can be broadly grouped into two categories, following Cox's famous distinction between:

problem-solving theory, which takes the structural characteristic of the present as given in order to be able to deal effectively with problems arising within it, and critical theory, which is concerned with how those structures emerged and how their existing forms may be liable to change.\(^49\)

The first category, highlighting aspects of RAMSI which could presumably be fixed through improved delivery and coordination include Moore, Fraenkel, Anderson, Kabutaulaka, Drumgold, and Sodhi.

Moore offers a few initial criticisms of RAMSI: it is overly focused on criminal justice, instead of peace and reconciliation; the lack of cultural awareness; the high turnover of RAMSI staff; and lack of attention to crumbling infrastructure.\(^50\) In another early study of the conflict, Fraenkel highlights problems with the justice system, which was overloaded after RAMSI's initial arrests.\(^51\) Anderson has criticised RAMSI for creating an 'aid bubble' in Honiara, whereby a select group of elites and expatriates are benefiting from an enlarged public service funded by injections of Australian aid

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\(^{48}\) Clive Moore. *Happy Isles in Crisis*, p.213  
\(^{50}\) Clive Moore. *Happy Isles in Crisis*, pp.212-216  
\(^{51}\) Jon Fraenkel. *The Manipulation of Custom*
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money, while many Solomon Islanders, including many working for RAMSI, are pushed out of Honiara by exorbitant rents into slums on the edge of town.\textsuperscript{52} Kabutaulaka cites RAMSI's focus on state institutions over non-state actors such as churches, big-men and women's organisations, which arguably have more control and influence over resources, as a source of tension.\textsuperscript{53} Drumgold claims that the focus of RAMSI was overly driven by criminalisation of war and pressure to make convictions, which is incompatible with reconciliation and building lasting peace.\textsuperscript{54} On the other hand, neo-liberal authors and think-tanks have criticised RAMSI for not going far enough with neo-liberal reform, especially around issues such as land reform, arguing that subsistence agriculture should be commercialised.\textsuperscript{55}

Examples from the second of Cox's categories, critical theory include Allen, Dinnen and Hameiri. Allen and Dinnen focus on analysing RAMSI's ideological direction. They identify that RAMSI employs a liberal interpretation of developing country violence which privileges ethnic conflict, criminalisation and state failure over political causes of conflict. Once framed this way, the solution to 'state failure' is the 'liberal peace' consisting of institutions, police, democracy, state building and market-led development. They conclude that RAMSI ignores local and indigenous approaches to conflict resolution, which might be able to respond to the deeper causes of conflict.\textsuperscript{56} Hameiri analyses RAMSI as an instance of regulatory regionalism, focusing on the way that state-building interventions transform the state. Conceived in this way, RAMSI is a political project that transfers

\textsuperscript{52} Tim Anderson. 'RAMSI: Intervention, Aid Trauma and Self Governance', \textit{Journal of Australian Political Economy} 62, (2008): 62-93
\textsuperscript{53} Tarcisius T. Kabutaulaka. 'Australian Foreign Policy and the RAMSI intervention'
\textsuperscript{54} Shane Drumgold. \textit{Palm Tree Justice}, Canberra: Shane Drumgold, 2011, p.291
political power from publicly and politically accountable institutions to transnationalised forms of governance led by experts and bureaucrats that support market-led development.\textsuperscript{57}

Although both types of analysis are valuable and indeed necessary, it is an important distinction is made. While the first set of authors provide specific instances which are problematic, the second set makes it possible to situate RAMSI as an ideological project within the broader context of Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter shows that there is broad agreement about the centrality of the 'arc of instability' as a driver of Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific. There is also broad consensus that the metaphor simplifies the dynamics of the region, even as authors disagree on important dynamics. The disagreement is between those authors that offer suggestions of how the intervention might be improved and those that critique the fundamental aspects of intervention, especially on an ideological level. Building on the work of several authors, I laid out a framework that I will use to analyse RAMSI in the following chapters. Specifically I conceptualise RAMSI as a project of institutional neo-liberalism which is attempting to create a model state insulated from popular influence through regulatory and regional mechanisms of governance. In the following chapter, I show how RAMSI is attempting to implement the transformations of governance in the Solomon Islands and justify my classification of RAMSI as a project of institutional neo-liberalisation and regulatory regionalism. In chapter three, I will examine key parts of the history of the Solomon Islands and suggest that the root causes of conflict are much more complex than can be admitted by a neo-liberal state-building project that needs insulation from the grievances of poor people. As a case study in Australian foreign policy, the implication is that the neo-liberal

\textsuperscript{57} Shahar Hameiri. \textit{Regulating statehood}
ideological framework that guides policy-making actually could have negative impacts on Australian and regional security, as causes of conflict are ignored and even exacerbated by neo-liberal projects.
2. RAMSI and its Limitations as a Neo-Liberal Project

Introduction

This chapter explores RAMSI’s ideological underpinning and its reflection in RAMSI’s structure and policies. The central argument presented here is that RAMSI's exclusive focus on law and order, good governance, and capacity building is attempting to transform governance in the Solomon Islands towards an institutional neo-liberal model of statehood. Beyond the initial task of restoring law and order, notions of good governance and capacity building have been central to the design and implementation of RAMSI – seen as necessary for ensuring long-term social and political stability in Solomon Islands. However, the ideas of good governance and capacity building that animate RAMSI’s objectives are more of an ideologically conceived abstraction, albeit a highly prescriptive one, than an empirically grounded analysis of the actual social, economic and political conditions in Solomon Islands. In this sense, RAMSI is reflective of the broader ideology behind Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific and its regulatory agenda.

The first part of this chapter will review several key concepts and apply them critically to the intervention. An account of institutional neo-liberalism and regulatory regionalism were introduced in chapter one. In this chapter, I use these concepts as a lens to examine how good governance and capacity building are employed by RAMSI in the Solomon Islands. The notion of ‘good governance’ is stripped of its apolitical veneer to reveal an ideology specifically supportive of private capital and hierarchical governance practices. The central questions to ask about claims of capacity building are: whose capacity is being 'built' to perform
which tasks? Capacity building is then shown to be a highly lopsided program that privileges interests aligned with private capital and associated with the institutions which are part of the good governance institutional framework. The second part will describe the structure and construction of RAMSI and how its good governance agenda is being implemented. Largely drawing from the policy objectives set out in the 2009 Partnership Framework, I will investigate the three 'pillars' of RAMSI: Law and Order; Economic Governance and Growth; and Machinery of Government (MoG). The pillars work together to create expectations and regulations for politicians and bureaucrats that support neo-liberal economic structures and de-legitimise or criminalise resistances to RAMSI's program. Furthermore, the scope for popular influence over public policy is diminished as accountability of both politicians and bureaucrats is shifted to transnational actors and private capital, undermining the desire for devolution of political power.

**Good Governance and Capacity Building**

In chapter one, I reviewed the literature on neo-liberalism, securitisation and regulatory regionalism and argued, that Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific and the Solomon Islands in particular is motivated by the idea of state failure. This means that the absence or poor functioning of modern, western institutions of statehood, particularly those which support liberal market-led development, is seen to present multiple potential security threats to the region. The objectives of Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific were then argued to be centred upon protecting regional stability and Australian security through state-building projects in the institutional neo-liberal mould, exemplified by RAMSI. This form of state-building typically does not involve the Australian government assuming direct control over Pacific Island states. Rather, these interventions take the form of what Jayasuriya and Hameiri have called ‘regulatory regionalism’, a collection of arm's

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2. RAMSI and its Limitations as a Neo-Liberal Project

length mechanisms by which states are regulated and policed through programmes such as RAMSI and the Pacific Plan. This section builds on this argument by using two key concepts employed by RAMSI: good governance, which broadly outlines RAMSI's objectives; and capacity building, the primary mechanism by which this agenda is implemented. This is in order to show that RAMSI is, at its core, a project designed to construct a neo-liberal state, and to demonstrate how this project is being implemented in the Solomon Islands.

The concepts of good governance and capacity building are central to all levels of RAMSI's intervention, as articulated in an address by RAMSI special coordinator Nicholas Coppel:

RAMSI, and other donors, must continue to focus on building the capacity and capability of Solomon Islands in the areas we have always focused: law and order, economic management and good governance.

RAMSI's particular understanding of good governance however is rooted in institutional neo-liberalism. While it gives the appearance of an apolitical agenda, it supports transformation of the state and governance, indeed the regionalisation of governance, under way in the Solomon Islands.

To be sure, the term 'good governance' is highly elastic and has been appropriated to refer to diverse concepts relating to the management and regulation of states, societies and economies. There is, however, a couple of concrete elements to highlight about the term before moving on to establish the particular conceptualisation that RAMSI employs. Firstly, the term originates in the discourse of donors and implicitly refers to goals that donors wish the recipients of aid to achieve. Secondly, as Doornbos points out, it is clearly an evaluative term: “used to invite judgement about how the

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country, city or agency was being 'goverened'.”

Good governance appeals to an objective rationality which understands development as conditional upon institutional structures rather than natural endowments, comparative advantages or other contextual factors. Therefore is applied to any given situation regardless of how particular contexts have been shaped by histories of colonialism or specific, localised factors.

Discourses around good governance can be located within the framework of institutional neo-liberalism in so far as they enable a shift in focus onto the governance and creation of institutions that regulate markets and societies in ways that are most friendly to private sector-led economic development. This model of institutional neo-liberalism is not to be confused with the model Weberian state where the bureaucracy is still directed by the (potentially democratic) executive and legislative arms of government. Rather, institutional neo-liberalism, manifests a preference for insulating particular regulatory institutions, specifically those associated with security and economic regulation, from political or popular control. The discourse of good governance helps to legitimise this agenda by appealing to an ‘objective’, rational and western standard of governance.

To Leftwich, it is
clear that the barely submerged structural model and ideal of politics, economics and society on which all notions of good governance rests is nothing less than that of western liberal (or social democratic) capitalist democracy

Through its claim to objectivity, good governance is used to open up space for programmes of reform that are regional (or global) and insulated from popular influence through various forms of regulatory regionalism.

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2. RAMSI and its Limitations as a Neo-Liberal Project

Good governance has been primarily associated with politics of development and aid. The World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators are used by donors, including the Bank itself, to assess where their development assistance might be most effective; developing states that perform well in these indicators are assumed to be more capable of effectively using aid.\(^6\) The shift from using measurements of good governance to allocate aid and loans to using it as a model for state-building arguably occurred with the emergence of the 'Bush Doctrine' and the invasion of Iraq:

The Bush doctrine’s aim was to recognize, institutionalize and expand the political effects of attacks on economic sovereignty that had taken place under the Washington Consensus of the 1980s and demands for Liberal good governance in the 1990s.\(^7\)

Thus, the good governance of 1990s development politics came to be utilised for state-building projects.

Specifically in the case of RAMSI, the good governance agenda opens up space, within and around the state, for forms of regulatory regionalism to monitor and police the activities of, rather than directly govern, the Solomon Islands state. The good governance approach focuses on what might be called ‘meta-governance’ institutions which regulate the functions of government and the economy. This meta-governance is envisioned as a long term or even permanent project, which will continue long after RAMSI leaves the Solomon Islands. It is also supported by regional organisations, specifically the Pacific Islands Forum, as a method of regulating domestic governance or policing statehood. Hameiri has contended that:

The hegemony of neoliberal notions of good governance in the formulation of RAMSI's objectives has meant that challenges to neoliberalism have been perceived as threatening to both political stability and the prospects of economic recovery and hence as security risks to be contained.\(^8\)


\(^7\) Toby Dodge. 'Coming face to face with bloody reality: Liberal common sense and the ideological failure of the Bush doctrine in Iraq', *International Politics* 46, no.2 (2009): 253-275, p.255

The point about good governance assuming a hegemonic stance is important when it is analysed as a technique of 'rational' risk management. RAMSI attempts to ensure that neoliberal notions of good governance are ubiquitous and authoritative. Other forms of governance become subservient to institutions promoting this form of ‘good governance’, or are eliminated altogether.

If institutional neo-liberal conceptualisations of good governance underpin RAMSI's policy agenda, then 'capacity building' is the mechanism by which the transformations in governance are enacted. As Hameiri has argued:

state capacity, rather than being an objective and technical measure of performance that can be ‘built’, essentially constitutes a political and ideological mechanism for operationalising projects of state transnationalisation.9

It should be clear that, at every point, the decision about which institutions to 'build' and who, within those institutions, is empowered, is a political decision. Indeed, capacity building is a highly lopsided program that singles out the particular institutions and actors for empowerment that support the good governance agenda. Specifically, 'capacity building' attempts to transform states according to a particular model of what an ideal state looks like. It is not surprising then that capacity building has been criticised as an overly hierarchical and potentially unachievable strategy. As Leftwich has articulated:

[capacity building] reflected a strongly top-down approach to development, a very limited conception of 'institutions' and the naïve belief that such institutions could be replicated, implemented or built anywhere – across space and time, and irrespective of prevailing cultures and distributions of power.10

Regardless of how realistic it is for this strategy to approximate the model of the neo-liberal state, the point is that transformations are occurring.

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10 Adrian Leftwich. 'Politics in Command' pp. 584-585
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RAMSI's capacity building work has consisted of Australian outside 'experts' being seconded directly into positions within relevant state institutions as well as serving in advisory roles. While this strategy makes it difficult to tell how much of the reform process is directed from Canberra, it serves the important role of harmonisation and alignment of interests between RAMSI and actors in the Solomon Islands. This process is an exercise of power aiming at the socialisation and internalisation of the discipline required for good governance and associated ideology. Gould, using a Foucaultian analysis, describes this kind of meta-governance as

the exercise of hegemonic authority through internalised disciplines of power [designed to rule] not through coercion but through complicity – by instilling a self-discipline in subjects that serves the interests of 'government' broadly understood."11

This is largely what capacity building consists of and RAMSI is undoubtedly aiming towards a point where the internalisation of discipline and ideology will be sufficient that Australians can leave Solomon Islanders to govern themselves.

While 'capacity building' and 'good governance' appear to be apolitical or even anti-political concepts, the institutions and practices that they promote are, of course, still embedded in particular attendant power relations. The struggle over political and economic power, particularly over resources will continue to remain central to the design and type of economic and political institutions."12 We see evidence of this in the Solomon Islands, where RAMSI's biggest 'successes' have been those that support or are supported by the logging industry and the inability to bring particular politicians to 'justice', despite the centrality of law and order to RAMSI's mission.

The Structure and Functions of RAMSI

A “central dilemma” facing RAMSI was that because corruption and criminality had so totally penetrated and bankrupted the government, it needed:

12 Adrian Leftwitch. 'Politics in Command', p.594
to be more than a mere 'circuit breaker', it was to go beyond disarming the militants. To arrest and convict those who had held the nation to ransom, Australia would have to take over critical functions in the judiciary and the prison service. [...] Crowning this strategy, Australians would have to move into the Finance Ministry, into Customs and Excise and into the Payroll Division.\(^13\)

RAMSI was envisioned as a long-term intervention into most aspects of governance in the Solomon Islands from the outset. Hameiri's research has shown that “RAMSI's indivisibility as a 'package' remains unequivocal to Australian and RAMSI officials.”\(^14\) Crucially this 'indivisibility' of the RAMSI 'package' meant that actors in the Solomon Islands, who were understandably desperate for help in arresting militants and recovering weapons were forced to agree to more long term cessions of sovereign powers. This obviously raises questions about the sincerity of Australian and RAMSI officials' rhetoric that places consent and partnership at the centre of the intervention and suggests that partnership and consent are being used as political technologies for state transformation.

In April 2009 the Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI signed a new \textit{Partnership Framework} (from now on referred to as the \textit{Framework}). The \textit{Framework} was created largely in response to demands for more concrete goals and an exit strategy for RAMSI. Instead of an exit strategy with a strict time frame, the \textit{Framework} sets out detailed targets that should be achieved before, or as RAMSI draws down its level of assistance. The overall goal was to achieve:

\begin{quote}
A peaceful Solomon Islands where key national institutions and functions of law and justice, public administration and economic management are effective, affordable and have the capacity to be sustained without RAMSI's further assistance.\(^15\)
\end{quote}

Reflecting the three steps of intervention outlined above, RAMSI's programme is structured around three 'pillars': Law and Justice; Economic Governance and Growth; and Machinery of Government (MoG) as well as three issues that cut across all three pillars: capacity development; gender


\(^{14}\) Shahar Hameiri. \textit{Regulating Statehood}, p.152

\(^{15}\) Forum Ministerial Steering Committee. \textit{Partnership Framework}, p.6
2. RAMSI and its Limitations as a Neo-Liberal Project

equality; and anti-corruption. There are over 100 individual strategies prescribed. These priorities clearly set RAMSI's agenda as one of meta-governance or, to put it another way, one of guidance and steering, as opposed to direct development assistance or investment in infrastructure.

Law and Order

The targets under the Law and Justice pillar are almost exclusively focused on the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) force, the court system and 'correctional services' all of which are placed squarely at the centre of Solomon Islands society. Although it is acknowledged that:

The greatest risk factors for a break-down in law and order are outside the issues of nationhood and ethnic rivalry. They are population growth, fiscal capability and stability, food security, youth unemployment and unmet expectations, addressing these problems clearly falls outside the conceptualisation of 'Law and Justice' employed by RAMSI, which is focused on arresting and incarcerating 'criminals'. Only one out of 55 strategies outlined for the Law and Justice pillar mentions chiefs and traditional leaders and the native/local court system. Even then it is explicitly clear that “the traditional justice systems must conform to the Constitution and national law” and no mention is made of any role for churches. What this demonstrates is not only a commitment to a (neo-)liberal idea of justice but a transformation of the governance of law and order in the Solomon Islands away from pluralistic forms of justice, which in practice incorporated localised traditional models operating alongside systems of incarceration, towards an exclusive centralised and modernised western system of policing and incarceration.

18 Forum Ministerial Steering Committee. Partnership Framework, p.45
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Former public defender in the Solomon Islands Shane Drumgold argues that the primary effect of RAMSI has been to turn “an old war-zone into a new crime scene.”\textsuperscript{20} Not only has RAMSI and the Participating Police Force reinvestigated old cases that had been resolved to everyone's satisfaction through traditional reconciliation ceremonies,\textsuperscript{21} but its magistrates and prosecutors have refused to apply the \textit{Amnesty Act 2000} and the \textit{Amnesty Act 2001}, negotiated as part of the Townsville Peace Agreement, thus undermining the previous peace process by which militants agreed to cease hostilities.\textsuperscript{22} Furthermore, RAMSI controlled courts and prisons implemented several practices that contravened Solomon Islands prison regulations and United Nations rulings on the treatment of prisoners, including handcuffing and placing accused criminals behind bars while standing trial,\textsuperscript{23} placing prisoners in 24 hour solitary confinement with no reasons given, removing life saving mosquito nets and lowering the quantity and quality of food that prisoners receive.\textsuperscript{24}

These examples demonstrate that RAMSI is designed as a political show of power that firmly places its own version of law and order not only above 'traditional' forms of conflict resolution but also above legislation passed by the parliament of the Solomon Islands. The criminalisation of former militants serves RAMSI's agenda by casting the problems that continue to plague the Solomon Islands in a law and order framework, thus denying the legitimacy of grievances that motivated militants.

Incarceration is also notable for the role it plays in the proletarianisation of a population and in complimenting the broader neo-liberal strategy of the marketisation of societies. The move towards a framework of 'law and order' over, for example, 'peace and reconciliation' or traditional forms of

\textsuperscript{20} Shane Drumgold. \textit{Palm Tree Justice}, Canberra: Shane Drumgold, 2011, p.20
\textsuperscript{21} Shane Drumgold. \textit{Palm Tree Justice}, pp.253-266
\textsuperscript{22} Shane Drumgold. \textit{Palm Tree Justice}, pp.283-287
\textsuperscript{23} Shane Drumgold. \textit{Palm Tree Justice}, pp.63-74
\textsuperscript{24} Shane Drumgold. \textit{Palm Tree Justice}, pp.75-97
conflict resolution can also be placed in a global context. LeBaron and Roberts locate the dramatic expansion of carceral systems globally since the 1970s as a central means by which states govern poor people:

The global expansion of carceral institutions and coercive power emerged in part to quell resistance to neoliberalism and criminalize alternatives to market dependence [...] in contrast to the postwar approach to the governance of social marginality through welfare and social assistance, criminalization and incarceration have emerged as a primary means of managing the contradictions and insecurities generated by neoliberal social and economic policies.  

This politics is reflected in the Solomon Islands, where a political choice has been made to criminalise and incarcerate people, who may be justifiably viewed as victims of a failed system themselves. However, in order to reproduce itself, neoliberal ideology must criminalise those who either resist or are excluded from liberal market relations. These processes reveal the philosophy at the heart of the governance transformations RAMSI is presiding over in the Solomon Islands – coercive governance and intervention can contain inconsistencies associated with unequal market-relations and market-failure. The law and order pillar is undoubtedly the coercive arm of RAMSI’s good governance agenda whereby incarceration waits for anyone who strays too far from the principles of good governance and the laws it supports.

Economic Governance and Growth

The Economic Governance and Growth pillar is focused on building capacity in institutions responsible for economic management, while promoting a distinctly neo-liberal economic policy agenda, designed to create an environment that is friendly to private sector led economic growth. Through the targets in the Framework RAMSI clearly sees its goals as building capacity in areas such as budgeting, accounting, auditing and financial regulation. Sectors of the economy not related to financial regulation are mentioned only twice.  

26 Forum Ministerial Steering Committee. Partnership Framework, pp.48-64
are implemented efficiently and are aligned with SIG priorities” and implies that RAMSI does not wish to assume direct responsibility for infrastructure development. Strategy 2.17 is about increasing competition within the telecommunications industry. Notable achievements before 2009 are said to have included the implementation of the *Foreign Investment Act 2005* and a reduction in tariffs from 20% to 10%. While the two self-identified highlights of the Economic Governance and Growth pillar are both about reducing barriers to international trade and investment, and indicate the neo-liberal core, the emphasis on capacity building, training and institutions reveal that this is a different kind of neo-liberalism than existed under the Washington Consensus, hence my characterisation of RAMSI's programme as institutional neo-liberalisation. The hidden assumption in this focus on regulation over economic development is that with the right kind of institutions in place the private sector will assume the role of driving economic development.

*Machinery of Government*

The MoG pillar is focused on providing technical assistance, training and advice, especially with developing legislation to: the Office of Prime Minister and Cabinet; Office of Auditor General; the Electoral Commission; the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening; and the National Parliament of the Solomon Islands; amongst others. That is, the ministries and state institutions that play a role in regulation, accountability and 'steering' functions of government. The overarching goal of the MoG pillar is “A Government Administration that is strategic, professional, transparent and accountable in the delivery of services and priority programs of the government of the day.” The MoG pillar operates under a similar logic to the Economic Governance and Growth

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27 Forum Ministerial Steering Committee. *Partnership Framework*, pp.50-51
28 Forum Ministerial Steering Committee. *Partnership Framework*, p.64
30 Forum Ministerial Steering Committee. *Partnership Framework*, pp.64-87
31 Forum Ministerial Steering Committee. *Partnership Framework*, p.64
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pillar, however instead of providing economic and financial regulation, the MoG pillar aims to institutionalise good governance, which, like economic regulation, is seen to provide a facilitative regulatory environment in which the private sector and donors can provide development goods. This transformation represents a shift in the role of politicians and bureaucrats, from driving development and the economy through encouraging direct investment to steering the private sector through regulation. The services and priority programs that the 'government of the day' can deliver is actually restricted to this new regulatory role because power over investment decisions is handed over to the private sector.

The transformation in the governance role of politicians and bureaucrats from 'driving' to 'steering' has been criticised by commentators as anti-democratic. Hirst argues that this trend in governance can:

place a great deal of society beyond the reach of genuine democratic decision and they so fragment the public sphere that the possibility of a centre of control, even notionally answerable to the democratic will, is seriously diminished. The state is not so much reduced in scale and scope, or hallowed out: rather it is fragmented and merged with non-state or non-public bodies.  

This fragmentation of the state, and relegation to playing a regulatory role in the governance of society, means that decisions regarding development, the economy and almost all other areas of life are further removed from popular influence. Instead, state power and accountability is distributed outwards to private capital, transnational actors, donors and to the objectivity of neo-liberal ideology.

Conclusion

Since 2003, RAMSI has been implementing large scale transformations of the governance structures in the Solomon Islands. The intervention was motivated by changes in Australian foreign

policy discourse that (re)framed failed states as risks to regional stability and ultimately Australian security. This process of securitisation and the management of risk have underpinned the entire structure, design and objectives of RAMSI. Building capacity for 'good governance' is seen as the primary guard against future state failure. However, the conceptualisation of good governance employed by RAMSI is in turn underpinned by an ‘institutional’ version of neo-liberal ideology. While still emphasising the primary role of markets and the private sector, the state and associated regulatory institutions play a much larger role in creating environments conducive to private sector led investment, particularly through mitigating risks such as corruption, violence, local resistance and financial security. The three pillars of RAMSI all uphold important aspects of this regulatory, private-sector-friendly environment. The Law and Justice pillar, with its emphasis on a central police force and the disciplinary justice of incarceration provides the social control needed for efficient markets. Corrupt politicians, desperate poor people, violent offenders and political dissidents are all criminalised and incarcerated because they, or the inconsistencies they represent, are seen as threats to liberal market-led economic development. The Economic Governance and Growth pillar, while still implementing traditional neo-liberal policies such as removing barriers to trade and investment, is largely focused on building a corruption free bureaucracy for the 'efficient' management of the economy. The MoG pillar is primarily concerned with strengthening those government institutions that are seen as essential for a neo-liberal state and market economy and insulating decision making from popular influence. Meanwhile the fundamental issues that led to conflict have remained largely unresolved.

Obviously the neo-liberal state model employed by RAMSI is full of the contradictions common to every manifestation of capitalism. However, the particularly concerning aspect of the institutional neo-liberal model is the assumption that the private sector and international investors will show up
to save the day. The next chapter will argue that the conflict was caused by a mix of grievances centring on inequitable development, land rights, the subordination of custom to modern western forms of government, and the centralisation of political power. RAMSI, however, has ignored these causes of conflict in order to legitimise the reform agenda outlined in this chapter, with the predictable danger that instability could be perpetuated rather than subdued.
3. RAMSI's Reinterpretation of Historical Conflict

Introduction

This chapter serves two purposes. Firstly it provides some of the historical and political context necessary to analyse the political situation in the Solomon Islands including the RAMSI intervention. I will examine some of the main historical issues of contention in order to critically evaluate the governance transformations that have been occurring since RAMSI's arrival. The second purpose is to elaborate upon the first half of the argument presented in this thesis: that RAMSI, because of its neo-liberal ideological framework, has reinterpreted the conflict by ignoring the root causes in favour of neo-liberal explanations and therefore failed to resolve the underlying issues. The context provided here is not intended to be an objective or definitive historical account; rather it is included in order to clearly demonstrate the narrowness of the assumptions inherent within RAMSI’s programs. Given RAMSI's reinterpretation, I argue that the root causes of conflict have been ignored and therefore the potential remains for conflict around these issues. In chapter four I expand on this argument and show how the short-sighted reforms promoted by RAMSI are actually replicating the conditions that led to the conflict in the first place.

Part one of this chapter will provide a brief history of the Solomon Islands, focusing on changing governance structures, and will be roughly chronological. A brief examination of pre-colonial governance structures and the colonial administration will demonstrate that the recent violent conflict has its roots in the power dynamics and methods of governance that have been evolving since colonisation. Various
social movements provide focal points in the history of the Solomon Islands especially as they helped the push towards independence. However, the version of independence granted in 1978 was not the de-colonisation as envisioned by pre-independence social movements. I will argue here that, a colonial architecture of government and governance remained after independence, which perpetuated many of the grievances that eventually sparked conflict in 1998. The Asian Financial Crisis and the collapse of the logging industry were key events leading to the crisis in 1998. While these events may have provided the economic conditions and proximate triggers, they don't fully account for the outbreak of conflict. The statements issued by the militias, clearly demonstrate that they were motivated by the same or similar grievances as prior social movements: a deep failure of power holders to satisfy many people's desire for land rights, equitable development, the devolution of political power, and a greater role for Melanesian kastom\(^1\) in politics. The period following the outbreak of tensions will also be briefly described, including looking at the manipulation of kastom, the peace process and the arrival of RAMSI.

The second part of this chapter will draw out some of the themes raised by the historical narrative outlined in the first part. Uneven and inequitable development, labour migration, the centralisation of power, the subordination of kastom, and land rights are all sources of discontent that have motivated social movements from the colonial period until the eventual outbreak of violence in 1998 and these remain significant issues today. RAMSI's neo-liberal ideology, which runs through its programs in Solomon Islands, is then argued to represent a teleological narrative for state-building that requires a radical reduction of the causes of conflict in order to support the paradigm of 'good governance'. This has left RAMSI incapable of addressing persisting grievances; the root

\(^1\) Kastom, pijin for custom, is perhaps the most complicated topic in the mix of Solomon Island politics. Supposedly based on an 'authentic' past, kastom actually varies significantly between cultures within the Solomon Islands. Kastom might be better thought of as a collection of 'laws' and ways of life that may or may not have roots in pre-colonial traditions, however they are often grouped together in-order to achieve political legitimacy. Regardless of the 'authenticity' of the policies, the notable aspect is the frequency and popularity of these demands.
causes of conflict remain simmering beneath the surface. The conclusion of this chapter then leads to the argument presented in chapter four, which outlines how the governance transformations that RAMSI is enacting in the Solomon Islands are replicating the situation that led to conflict in 1998, thus providing no real security for either the Solomon Islands, the South Pacific or Australia.

From pre-colonial governance to WWII

There is neither the space nor scope to discuss pre-colonial governance in the Solomon Islands in detail, however, a few broad points should be mentioned here because of their relevance to contemporary politics. There were over eighty distinct languages and many dialects of each existing in the Solomon Islands prior to colonisation; culture, political organisation and production were similarly diverse. While most of the population survived on subsistence agriculture, there was an intricate network of trade between groups. Historians and anthropologists theorise that each village of up to 200 people was ruled loosely by up to five 'big-men'.

Cultural ceremonies existed to maintain and restore peace between conflicting groups and facilitate trade in important and specialised resources.

Solomon Islands was declared a British protectorate in 1893. Motivations for colonisation included the demand for labour, with Solomon Islanders making up the bulk of indentured labourers on the plantations in Fiji and Queensland, and security concerns over other European powers establishing themselves close to the vulnerable Australian colonies. To secure funding for the administration, massive processes of land alienation and pacification were driven by the government in order to establish plantations and attract foreign investment, especially on the islands of New Georgia and

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4 Judith A. Bennett. *Wealth of the Solomons*, pp.103-106
3. RAMSI's Reinterpretation of Historical Conflict

Guadalcanal. These processes, though haphazard and piecemeal, represented epistemic violence (and was enforced with physical violence) against indigenous governance structures, customs and religions which were imperfectly replaced by European notions of government and religion.

Since virtually all the old means of acquiring and, more important, maintaining power were closed, many of the elders attempted to prop up the ruins of their authority by obtaining and redistributing wealth from other sources.

Through the violent processes of pacification and land alienation, the British coerced former elites to loosely integrate into capitalist production and trade, replacing traditional trade and gift networks.

While land alienation and pacification came relatively swiftly to parts of the Solomon Islands, the main contact Malaitans had with Europeans was through the labour trade. With a dense population and rugged terrain, the island of Malaita was more appealing as a source of labour for plantations in Queensland, Fiji and other Solomon Islands than as a site for new plantations. From 1870-1911 Malaitans made up 58% of Solomon Islanders working as indentured labourers abroad; after the international labour trade dried up, Malaitans became the main source of labour working in domestic plantations; between 1913-40 they made up 68% of the domestic labour trade. However, [Britain] did little to develop Malaita itself. Since independence, governments have not questioned the British blueprint: Malaita, still underdeveloped, remains a huge labour reserve for industries on other islands.

This inequitable situation facilitated the beginnings of social movements in the Solomon Islands. The 'Gizo Revolt' in 1934 saw 38 people arrested for refusing to pay taxes. Their refusal was a protest against taxes remaining at £1 while copra prices plummeted and the lack of government spending or attention given in return for the tax. The 'Rule and Chair' movement, under the

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6 Judith A. Bennett. *Wealth of the Solomons*, p.115
9 Judith A. Bennett. *Wealth of the Solomons*, p.247
guidance of Reverend Richard Fallows, petitioned the government for technical schools, medical clinics, higher wages, that the administration of the Solomon Islands not to be handed over to Australia, and fair prices for copra.\textsuperscript{10} Essentially these protests were about the lack of development assistance the government provided in return for taxes collected.

\textbf{From WWII to Independence}

The effect of World War II on the Solomon Islands is difficult to overstate. From the perspective of decolonisation two points are essential. Firstly, a destabilisation of global geopolitics tied the political reality of the Pacific Islands to the ever-changing interests of colonial masters.

Years before Japan's defeat, politicians in London, Paris, Washington, Canberra and Wellington had already commenced designing a new Pacific. But because each power entertained different agendas...it was an imbalanced, inconsistent and, as ever, inequitable initiative which yielded the Pacific chessboard still wrestled over today.\textsuperscript{11} Secondly, the war and particularly the politics imparted by African-American soldiers influenced the emergence of several social movements.

The Society for the Development of Native Races in Western Guadalcanal organised around demands for formal education, economic development, political representation and codifying customary law.\textsuperscript{12} The indigenous breakaway Christian Fellowship Church in the Western Solomons focused on providing grass-roots welfare services when the Methodist Church and government were seen to be failing the people. In 1957-1958, the Moro Movement in Guadalcanal advocated for and organised the development of self-sufficiency, land rights and a revival of \textit{kastom}.\textsuperscript{13} The heavy concentration of development on Guadalcanal and the accompanying influx of migrants had fuelled resentment over the alienation of land, the lack of rent and other benefits received and the perceived

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Judith A. Bennett. \textit{Wealth of the Solomons}, pp.261-263
\item Steven Fischer. \textit{A History of the Pacific Islands}, 2002, New York: Palgrave, p.211
\item Judith A. Bennett. \textit{Wealth of the Solomons}, p.299
\item Judith A. Bennett. \textit{Wealth of the Solomons}, p.316
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
erosion of Guadalcanal's culture as other migrants brought different customs with them. Reacting against the lack of development on Malaita that had driven Malaitans to sell themselves as labourers on foreign shores, Maasina Ruru, supported by up to 96% of Malaitans, withdrew labour from the protectorate in protest and demanded equitable development on Malaita and more power in decision making.\(^\text{14}\) Jonathon Fifi'i\(^\text{15}\) provides a vision of Maasina Ruru as a movement for both locally controlled development and preserving *kastom*. After government repression and the arrest of thousands of followers, as well as some moderate success, Maasina Ruru ended and Malaitans again made up a substantial portion of the domestic labour trade. Kabutaulaka cites that, by 1981, Malaita was home to 31% of the population of the Solomon Islands but still only had 7% of the employment opportunities.\(^\text{16}\) In contrast to the underdevelopment of Malaita, Guadalcanal was home to oil palm plantations, the gold ridge gold mine and the capital city, Honiara, all of which involved migrant labour and land alienation from traditional owners from the 1950s to 1998.\(^\text{17}\)

In 1974, Britain faced the global fuel crisis and integration into the European Economic Community, and lost interest in its Pacific colonies. At this point, slow decolonisation was abandoned and the Solomon Islands, without having a unified independence movement against British colonialism, had independence thrust upon it in 1978.\(^\text{18}\) The independent government inherited an intact colonial architecture together with its peoples' animosity towards the central Honiara government. As a consequence of Britain's inconsistent treatment of different islands, lasting regional divisions were created within the Solomon Islands. During colonial rule, Britain also turned people of different islands against each other, for example by using a \text{"Western Solomon

\(^{14}\) Clive Moore. 'The Misappropriation of Malaitan Labour', p.244

\(^{15}\) Jonathan Fifi'i. *From Pig Theft to Parliament: My Life Between Two Worlds*, Honiara, 1989, see chapter 5, pp. 60-77

\(^{16}\) These figures relate to 1981, however the situation is said to have become more extreme during the following decade - Tarcisius T. Kabutaulaka. 'Beyond Ethnicity: the political economy of the Guadacanal crisis in the Solomon Islands' *State Society and Governance in Melanesia Project* Working Paper 01/1, 2001, Available at: [https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/41949](https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/41949)

\(^{17}\) Clive Moore. 'The Misappropriation of Malaitan Labour' p.226

\(^{18}\) Judith A. Bennett. *Wealth of the Solomons* p. 321
militia” to arrest and suppress the Maasina Ruru movement on Malaita. The animosity and mistrust from this history continues well into the twenty first century.

From independence to 'the tensions'

The Solomon Islands' inheritance from the British was a palimpsest: a modern, western and specifically British form of government imposed on top of continuing diverse traditions and cultures. Instead of combining the best of two systems, the Solomon Islands may have inherited the worst, or at least an incompatible mix of Indigenous values and European government. Four major and related issue-areas dominated politics in the Solomon Islands during the decades following independence: foreign dependence, regionalism, the logging industry and conflict between 'kastom' and Western styles of government.

Foreign Dependence

Epeli Hau'ofa observed in 1978 that: “The main beneficiaries [of south pacific island integration into regional economies] are the privileged, elite groups all over the region.” The years after independence surely confirmed this assertion as a growing elite became dependent on an international cash economy involving the export of logs, fish, palm oil, copra, cocoa and gold. Another main source of income for the Solomon Islands is foreign aid: by 1990, aid accounted for 22% of GDP. As the government was almost constantly facing bankruptcy during the 90s, this aid money was critical to its survival. Unfortunately, exports and aid have done little for the majority of Solomon Islanders, 84 per cent of whom are still subsistence farmers. Moreover, the reliance on aid and a small number of primary resource-exports has stopped or even reversed the decolonisation

19 Judith A. Bennett. Wealth of the Solomons p.295
22 Clive Moore. Happy Isles in Crisis, p.69
process as foreign dependence, inequality and the centralisation of power have grown. In the words of Malama Meleisea: “The uncritical acceptance of development leads us to demolish our traditional institutions and create new ones in the expectation that our economies will grow and that we will all be better off.”23 These processes of globalisation, or at least regionalisation, cemented in place the Westminster style of centralised government and further frustrating those advocating for devolution, equitable development and recognition of *kastom*.

**Regionalism**

Provincial governments and the earlier district councils became the primary voices of regionalism in most parts of the country, taking over where the earlier social movements had left off. The process of setting up local councils, largely in response to the continued agitation of social movements for local representation, devolution and decentralisation of power, began as early as the 1930s and by the 1950s all the larger islands had district councils.24 These councils were usually governed by a council of elders and were “entrusted with demarcating the borders of various clans, codifying custom and setting up district courts.”25 In 1981, under the Mamaloni government, these councils were incorporated into a new system of provincial government.26 Demands for continued devolution of power persisted, resurfacing in a 1987 constitutional review27 and was one of the primary grievances of the militants who began fighting in 1998.28 By the 1990s there were nine provincial governments and a separate council for the city of Honiara.29

23 Malama Meleisea. 'Ideology in Pacific Studies' in *Class and Culture in the South Pacific* edited by A. Hooper et. al., 140-153, Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1978, p.151
25 Jon Fraenkel. *The Manipulation of Custom*, p.31
26 See Wilson Ifunaoa. 'Implementing Provincial Government' in *Solomon Islands Politics*, edited by Peter Larmour and Sue Tarua, 196-207, Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1983
27 Clive Moore. *Happy Isles in Crisis*, p.47
The Logging Industry

Since independence, logging had become the largest industry in the Solomon Islands. From 1990 to 1998, timber accounted for 45 per cent of Solomon Islands exports.\textsuperscript{30} Timber exports were worth S$349 million in 1999 and contributed 20 per cent to government revenue.\textsuperscript{31} An analysis of the political economy of logging reveals that these figures alone fail to represent the importance of this industry. Logging money from East Asian firms injected cash directly into local communities, through the 'big-men' who negotiated contracts. This was often the only source of cash available to the majority of the population, many of whom still lived in very remote areas and survived on subsistence agriculture. Furthermore, the 'big-men' who negotiated logging contracts were able to distribute resources to their supporters and gain power, often using their influence to run for election to provincial or national parliament.\textsuperscript{32} Vast patronage networks had developed by 1997, characterised by corruption, illegal tax breaks, and control of the limited supply of cash in the economy and the resultant political power. In 1997 alone it is estimated that the government missed out on S$70 million through remissions and exemptions on export duty granted to logging companies.\textsuperscript{33} Logging has also precipitated localised conflict, as communities are split into those who benefit from logging and those who oppose it on the grounds of erosion of fertile soil, the degradation of ecosystems, protecting sacred sites, or a preference for traditional life over modernisation driven by cash.\textsuperscript{34}

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\textsuperscript{30} Jon Fraenkel. \textit{The Manipulation of Custom}, p.39  \\
\textsuperscript{31} Clive Moore. \textit{Happy Isles in Crisis}, p.76  \\
\textsuperscript{32} Shahar Hameiri. 'Mitigating the risk to primitive accumulation: State-building and the Logging Boom in the Solomon Islands' \textit{Journal of Contemporary Asia} 42, no.3 (2012): 405-426  \\
\textsuperscript{33} Jon Fraenkel. \textit{The Manipulation of Custom}, p.41  \\
\textsuperscript{34} For examples of localised conflict see: Russell Hawkins. \textit{Since the Company Came}, Ronin Films, videocassette (VHS), 2000
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Parliamentary Coalitions and Kastom

A major problem is the supposed incompatibility between the Westminster system of parliament and Melanesian Kastom. Kwa'iola and Burt express the view that the prime-ministerial system is part of a colonial architecture that devalued elements of Kastom, such as the matrilinial inheritance of land rights (on Guadalcanal) and relationships between family groups. On the other hand, Moore emphasises elements of Kastom which prevented liberal democracy working the way it did in Europe:

Between 1970 and 1997, Solomon Islands developed a style of government in which a few key men dominated political leadership. There was no loyalty to political ideologies or parties... Politicians were far more beholden to their extended families than to their wider electorates. There had been little decentralisation of government processes, and tension built up between the regions and the central government. Issues such as inequities in infrastructure development, over-exploitation of resources and lack of compensation to Guadalcanal for hosting the capital city... There was a growing feeling that independence had not realised earlier hopes of creating a truly indigenous style of government.

Fraenkel places this tension and the manipulation of custom at the centre of the conflict and as a primary motive for militancy. Politicians and militants were able to demand and secure 'compensation' payments from the government, using the language of traditional culture to mask greed, criminality and rent seeking.

Given this, the major challenge for politicians in the Solomon Islands was to establish a stable enough coalition of parties and independent MPs in order to form government. Fraenkel describes the key aspects of this phenomenon well:

[the coalitions that formed government were] based on the weaving together of fragile power bases that drew on personal allegiances. MPs’ positions proved highly precarious. Elections were extraordinarily competitive. Political parties proved of limited significance. Around 50 per cent of incumbents lost their seats at each general election. To avoid defeat, parliamentarians had to bring home the bacon, switching sides if necessary in order to do so. […] Ministerial

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36 Clive Moore. *Happy Isles in Crisis*, p.63
37 Jon Fraenkel. *The Manipulation of Custom*
portfolios gave access to central government funds, and permitted parliamentarians to redistribute gains to political allies or to *wantoks*\(^{38}\) back in rural villages.\(^{39}\) This style of politics, driven by the ability to distribute resources rather than by ideology, produced vast self-sustaining patronage networks from the Prime Minister to local villages and often intimately connected to the logging industry.\(^{40}\) This system proved to be sustainable by incorporating potential dissidents into patronage networks. It only unravelled when money began to dry up during the Asian Financial Crisis, which paved the way for popular grievances such as land rights, inequitable development and migration patterns to again take centre stage.

In 1997, the Asian Financial Crisis hit Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, three of the larger export destinations for logs from Solomon Islands. The collapse of the logging boom sent shocks through the patronage networks, which had been sustained by the cash received for logs. In the wake of the financial crisis and discontent over the Mamaloni government's poor financial management (particularly the lost revenue from corruption in the logging industry), Bartholomew Ulufa'alu's Solomon Islands Alliance for Change coalition was elected into government in 1997. Assisted by the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, he initiated a programme of structural reform, focused on the neo-liberal objectives of privatisation, reducing government debt and downsizing the public sector.\(^{41}\) The corrupt practices of the logging industry were also in the line of fire of these reforms. The downsizing of the public sector – 447 government employees were made redundant by March 1999 – was a major factor in Uluafa'alu's declining

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\(^{38}\) *Wantok* is a pijin word which roughly translates to an extended family network, including everyone speaking the same dialect, not necessarily related by blood or marriage.


\(^{40}\) The exception to this generalisation are the various political parties that have sprung out of the trade union movement, these however have proven largely unsuccessful for a variety of reasons: see Bart Ulufa'alu. 'The Development of Political Parties' in *Solomon Islands Politics*, edited by Peter Larmour and Sue Tarua, 101-106, Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1983 and Bart Ulufa'alu. 'Trade Unions and Politics' in *Solomon Islands Politics*, edited by Peter Larmour and Sue Tarua, 117-132, Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1983

\(^{41}\) Jon Fraenkel. *The Manipulation of Custom*, p.41
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The civil service was one of the largest sources of cash for Solomon Islanders and had supported a growing professional class in Honiara. Just as the Asian Financial Crisis had seen a decline in the cash economy fuelled by the logging industry, the redundancies saw more cash removed from society and opened more space for grievances centring on inequality to take centre stage.43

Indeed, Allen locates the proximate triggers of conflict as the "the disruption to political patronage networks engendered by the impact, in the late 1990s, of declining demand for Solomons log exports due to the Asian financial crisis [and] the subsequent donor-inspired, structural reform agenda of the Solomon Islands Alliance for Change government that came to power in 1997."44 As 'big-men' lost influence and cash dried up, space was created for alternative political agendas. Especially on Guadalcanal, resentment grew at the lack of compensation received for the alienation of large tracts of land. Without logging money and without benefits from land alienation, political leaders on Guadalcanal began to organise around their long held grievances in order to obtain land rights, rent and recognition of kastom.

'The tensions'

As we have already seen, vast social differences existed in the Solomon Islands. Perhaps the biggest flash point was always going to be the area around Honiara on Guadalcanal, where a convergence of grievances had centred on foreign-owned capitalist projects. The Solomon Island Plantations Limited plantations, the Gold Ridge mine and urban Honiara had simultaneously fuelled a corrupt political machine, alienated Guadalcanal traditional owners from their land and objectified

42 Jon Fraenkel. The Manipulation of Custom, p.42
43 For another version of this argument see: Matthew Allen. 'Long-term engagement: The future of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands', Strategic Insights 51, Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute (2011)
44 Mathew Allen. 'Long-term engagement' p.5; see also Shahar Hameiri. 'State Building or Crisis Management? A critical analysis of the social and political implications of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands', Third World Quarterly 30, no.1 (2009): 35-52
Malaitans as a source of cheap labour. The peaceful calls of successive movements for equitable development, devolution and land rights, made by so many people over the last century, from Maasina Ruru to the Moro Movement to the provincial governments, had all been ignored by power-holders.

July 1998 saw the first militant actions taken by the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army, later renamed the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM). The IFM was widely viewed as an armed wing of the Guadalcanal Provincial Council's leadership. Premier Ezekiel Alebua made several apparently threatening speeches in the months following the outbreak of violence and in February 1999 the Guadalcanal Provincial Assembly published a list of 13 demands. These demands included: devolution of power, income, and assets, including shares in SIPL and land titles on Guadalcanal, to the Guadalcanal Provincial Council; reform of the constitution and legislation to provide for kastom and regulate migration and land ownership; compensation for the alleged murder of Guale people; and relocating the national capital. Two things are immediately striking about this list of demands: firstly the similarity of grievances to those articulated by previous social movements and provincial councils, and secondly the intense parochialism. Demands for land rights, devolution of political power, and equitable development are forcefully articulated next to and perhaps even underwritten by a toxic understanding of difference. People from other provinces, particularly Malaita, are implicitly blamed for the injustices on Guadalcanal, rather than the people directly profiting from the simultaneous exploitation of land on Guadalcanal and Malaitan labour, namely national and international corporations and venal politicians.

45 Clive Moore. *Happy Isles in Crisis*
47 For the full text of the demands see ‘appendix 2’ in Jon Fraenkel. *The Manipulation of Custom*, pp.197-203
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The main focus of the IFM's violence was the many Malaitan settlers on Guadalcanal, who worked on the SIPL plantations and other projects on the northern plains of Guadalcanal, who lived in villages near their workplaces and in slums around Honiara, and even those who had married into Guale families. Attacks focused on the Gold Ridge gold mine, plantations, schools and villagers with large internal immigrant populations. People were threatened to leave, businesses closed and villages were abandoned. By the end of 1999 over 35,000 people had been displaced, most of these had fled to Honiara or Malaita.48

In May 1999 prime-minister Uluafa'alū, recognising the long standing grievances of Guale people, conceded some of the demands made by the Guadalcanal Provincial Council, including handing over SI$500,000, and promised to consider state government, handing over of some SIPL shares and some form of resource sharing.49 These concessions, however, failed to stop the IFM from continuing with the evictions of Malaitans from rural Guadalcanal – the violence actually escalated with thousands more evicted and at least three people killed.50 Further attempts at peace were made: in June 1999 the Honiara Accord was signed with the government again promising to review legislation around land rights and resource sharing, in exchange for militia leaders promising to disarm and disband.51 This however did not happen, whether because the political leaders had little control over the militants themselves,52 because they did not trust the government to make good on its promises, or because the cash extracted through violence was too attractive to give up. Regardless of the reason, many authors point to the growing practice of corruption and extortion practiced by militants. The government further responded to this violence by offering more

48 Jon Fraenkel. The Manipulation of Custom. p.55
49 Jon Fraenkel. The Manipulation of Custom. p.65
50 Jon Fraenkel. The Manipulation of Custom. p.66
51 Jon Fraenkel. The Manipulation of Custom. p.70
52 The GRA/IFM leaders were not present at these negotiations, leaving the Guadalcanal Provincial Council to negotiate on behalf of Guadalcanal.
Creating a Perfect Storm: Is RAMSI reproducing conditions ripe for violence in the Solomon Islands?

Lian Sinclair

'compensation' deals. A further SI$2.5 million cheque was given to the Guadalcanal Provincial Council and SI$1,000 promised to each Malaitan displaced by the conflict.\(^{53}\)

The Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) formed in January 2000 as a militia designed to defend Malaitans living in and around Honiara against the IFM. Much of the police force was Malaitan and reportedly many police officers collaborated with and even defected to join the MEF. In June 2000 a 'joint operation' between the MEF and members of the Solomon Islands Police Force raided the main police armoury at Rove and took high-powered weaponry and supplies.\(^{54}\) The situation then turned into a kind of civil war between two armed factions; violence escalated more people were forced to flee, this time from Honiara back to rural Guadalcanal and other islands. In June 2000 Prime Minister Uluafa'alu was forced to resign at gun point in an MEF-led coup and was eventually replaced by Manasseh Sogavare.\(^{55}\)

A further attempt at peace was made following this escalation of conflict. On October 15 2000 the Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA), facilitated by the Australian and New Zealand governments, was negotiated between the leaders of the IFM, the MEF, national politicians and provincial premiers. The agreement provided that all sides were to lay down arms and disband their militias and for an International Peace Monitoring Team to be deployed.\(^{56}\) An important element of the agreement was a government commitment to “a set of extraordinarily ambitious schemes for public works on Malaita and Guadalcanal”\(^{57}\) – effectively recognising the fundamental grievances of militias about inequitable development. While the TPA brought an end to formal conflict between the IFM and MEF, only a small portion of the estimated weapons possessed by militants were

\(^{53}\) Jon Fraenkel. The Manipulation of Custom. p.67 & p.80
\(^{54}\) Jon Fraenkel. The Manipulation of Custom. p.87
\(^{55}\) Jon Fraenkel. The Manipulation of Custom. p.93
\(^{56}\) Jon Fraenkel. The Manipulation of Custom. p.99
\(^{57}\) Jon Fraenkel. The Manipulation of Custom. p.100
handed in and huge compensation payments, especially to former militant leaders, set the scene for “ransacking the state”.\(^{58}\) Fraenkel refers to this phenomenon as 'the manipulation of custom' because 'traditional' notions of customary compensation were manipulated and levelled against the national government in order to extort cash. Sogavare admitted that SI$40 million had been paid out in 'bogus' compensation claims by April 2001\(^{59}\) and a further SI$28 million was granted in import and export duty remissions.

The economic cost of the conflict was devastating. Disruption to logging, fisheries, plantations and the Gold Ridge gold mine saw a drop in real GDP of 14.1 per cent in 2000.\(^{60}\) By 2002 the state had become “totally bankrupt” with government debt at A$430 million.\(^{61}\) With no military, and a police force that had largely joined the militias, the Solomon Islands government was virtually powerless to stop the conflict. Critical infrastructure was failing because of the lack of money, and the case was made that the Solomon Islands had become a 'failed state'. Calls for international assistance were being made from everyone – three successive Prime Ministers, political commentators, the Civil Society Network, academics and churches. The Solomon Islands government declared itself a 'failed state' in need of international assistance in order to restore peace, government control and eventually sovereignty. Just months before the 2000 coup, Australia had refused the then Prime Minister Ulafa'alu's requests for military intervention.\(^{62}\)

**The RAMSI intervention**

In 2003 Australian Prime Minister Howard and Foreign Minister Downer announced the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands. This was a complete turnaround for the Australian
Government and the Foreign Minister in particular who, only months earlier had gone on record stating that:

    Sending in Australian troops to occupy the Solomon Islands would be folly in the extreme. It would be widely resented in the Pacific region. [...] foreigners do not have the answers for deep-seated problems afflicting Solomon Islands.63

As discussed in chapter one, the RAMSI intervention followed a changing attitude in Australian foreign policy decision-making circles about non-traditional security threats globally and the 'arc of instability' in the South Pacific, with the Solomon Islands representing the most 'fragile' state, if not the first 'failed state' in the region. One of the most important ingredients of the intervention, from the point of view of the Australian government, was obtaining the consent not just of the Solomon Islands government but also of other Pacific Island states. Before any troops hit the ground, the then Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza visited Canberra to make a formal request for assistance, members of the Pacific Islands Forum signed the RAMSI treaty and the Solomon Islands parliament has passed the *Facilitation of International Assistance Act*.64

RAMSI, by all accounts, had initial positive impacts in the Solomon Islands and particularly in Honiara where violence and crime dramatically decreased. In the first few weeks of the mission, over 2,500 weapons were handed in.65 By November, 1,340 people had been arrested, including 25 police officers,66 and peace returned to the Solomon Islands. However Australian motivations for intervention were not restricted to the stabilisation of Solomon Islands. The 2003 policy document *Our Failing Neighbour* informed much of the Australian Government's policy. It identifies three motivations for intervention: preventing the Solomon Islands becoming “a petri dish of

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63 Tarcisius T. Kabutaulaka. 'Australian Foreign Policy and the RAMSI intervention', *Contemporary Pacific* 17, no.2 (2005): 283-310
65 Clive Moore. *Happy Isles in Crisis*, p.212
66 Jon Fraenkel. *The Manipulation of Custom*, p.175
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transnational crime” including terrorism; trade interests worth A$106 million annually to Australia; and Australia's international prestige.67

RAMSI's reform agenda was discussed in detail in chapter two, here I will outline some of the tensions that have existed between RAMSI and local actors. A significant voice of opposition to RAMSI has been the Ma'asina Forum, a Malaitan based organisation formed in 2003. The Ma'asina forum has continually criticised RAMSI, particularly for ignoring and devaluing Melanesian kastom and for the immunity from Solomon Islands law which RAMSI personnel are granted under the Facilitation of International Assistance Act 2003. The views of the Ma'asina Forum reflect a small but significant opposition to the perceived continuation of the supremacy of Western government over tradition, and they explicitly predict that this could lead to further acts of resistance, even violence.68

One of the most dramatic events to have occurred since the 2003 intervention was the April 2006 riots following the election of Synder Rini as Prime Minister. The riots saw most of Chinatown in Honiara burnt to the ground and RAMSI was largely blamed for failing to anticipate and prevent the riots from getting out of control.69 Moore argues that the riots were politically motivated, methodical and targeted specific 'new' Chinese businesses and RAMSI personnel, vehicles, and places associated with the intervention, signifying a deep failure to address inequality in the years following the conflict.70 During the riots, significant anti-RAMSI feeling was evidenced by graffiti sprayed on buildings and on burnt out police wagons that read 'fuck RAMSI'.71 Synder Rini

67 Elsina Wainwright. Our Failing Neighbour, Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2001
70 Clive Moore. 'No more walkabout long Chinatown: Asian involvement in the economic and political process' in Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands, Canberra: Asia Pacific Press, 2008
71 Matthew G. Allen. ‘Resisting RAMSI’, p.13
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subsequently resigned and Manasseh Sogavare was elected as Prime Minister 16 days after the riots broke out.

Sogavare had been one of the few public critics of RAMSI in Solomon Islands Parliament, calling other ministers “puppets of foreign governments” for supporting RAMSI. This was most likely empty rhetoric designed to play on a small but popular anti-RAMSI sentiment that had developed, because when it counted, Sogavare supported RAMSI: during an earlier term as Prime Minister in 2000-2001 he had called for foreign intervention and he had voted for the *Facilitation of International Assistance Act* in 2003. Regardless of the content of prior rhetoric, several issues emerged in 2006 that Sogavare fought RAMSI over. One of Sogavare's first moves as Prime Minister in 2006 was an attempt to establish an inquiry into the riots, which RAMSI and the Australian Government bitterly opposed, perhaps because they wished to avoid the spotlight on their biggest failure to keep peace in Honiara. When Australia's High Commissioner in the Solomon Islands was reported to have lobbied donors not to fund the inquiry, he was expelled from the country. When the Attorney-General took Australia's side and refused to establish the inquiry, he was stood down by Sogavare on September 21, 2006 and replaced by Australian Julian Moti in July 2007.

Sogavare used the opportunity to articulate a broader issue with RAMSI's approach:

> Lasting peace could not come to Solomon Islands until and unless all the underlying issues were fully addressed... For foreigners to think they would address peace in Solomon Islands by heavy handed legalistic approach was a wistful [sic] thinking.

Sogavare also pursued the policy of re-arming the police force using aid money from Taiwan, which was successfully opposed by RAMSI and the Australian government. Although these issues were all but forgotten after the elections of Derek Sikua and Kevin Rudd respectively as Prime Ministers

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73 Joel Atkinson. 'Big Trouble in Little Chinatown', p.62
74 Deli Oso. 'PM Explains Why He Expel Mr Cole' *Solomon Star*, 19 September 2006 , quoted in: Joel Atkinson. 'Big Trouble in Little Chinatown', p.61
75 Joel Atkinson. 'Big Trouble in Little Chinatown', p.63
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in 2007, they clearly demonstrate a level of unwillingness from RAMSI and the Australian Government to take grievances seriously.

**A history of struggles against inequality**

As we have seen from the examination of social movements, inequality has consistently fuelled the anger and jealousy of Solomon Islanders who miss out on the (mixed) benefits of development. In reality this inequality benefits neither Malaitan labourers or Guale peasants, but a centralised elite who have benefited from tax revenue and several transnational corporations and investors, as profits from plantations, mines and forests have been repatriated to Australia, Malaysia and across the globe. The Gizo Revolt, the Rule and Chair Movement, Massina Ruru, the Society for the Development of Native Races, the Christian Fellowship Church and the Moro Movement were all independent movements, yet all articulated similar desires: the devolution and decentralisation of political power, the codification of *kastom* into law, land rights and equitable economic development.⁷⁶

These social movements only ever achieved partial success in the form of concessions made by the central government; they were ultimately ignored or repressed. The disputes and grievances were never resolved. As we have seen, many of the same grievances, especially the devolution of political power and equitable development, were later taken up by provincial councils and local politicians in the post-independence period, who achieved similar limited results. It is hardly surprising then that, in a time of economic downturn following the Asian Financial Crisis, these fundamental grievances resurfaced, although this time the claimants used violence to back up the demands. The demands articulated by the Guadalcanal Provincial Council and the IFM constitute the self-identified reasons for initiating armed conflict, given the almost total failure of previous

non-violent attempts to satisfy these demands. The pre-RAMSI peace process, while largely failing to convince militants to disarm or disband, acknowledged inequality as the primary cause of conflict and attempted to redress the situation through promising more appropriate development projects and compensation payments. Unfortunately, by the time the state moved to address the issues, militia leaders were in a sufficiently powerful position to manipulate and corrupt the process of compensation. Finally, there are glimpses of these grievances persisting in the post-intervention Solomon Islands: the 2006 riots targeted RAMSI vehicles and property, along with 'new' Chinese immigrants; groups such as the Ma'asina Forum claim RAMSI is continuing the same inequitable and pro-western politics as the post-colonial governments had done; politicians, Sogavare in particular, continue to criticise RAMSI for the persisting centralisation of power and development that its policies promote.

**RAMSI's Account of Conflict**

In contrast to the narrative presented in this chapter, RAMSI provides this explanation for the causes of the conflict:

> After five years of ethnic tensions, and a coup in 2000, the problems facing this troubled nation were many and serious. Law and order had broken down, officials and private citizens were subject to intimidation and violence, and corruption was unfettered. The Government and its institutions had ceased to function effectively. Corruption was widespread. Public finances were in ruin and many of the most basic services such as health and education were not being delivered to the people.⁷⁷

From this statement, the most detailed offered on RAMSI's website, it seems that the causes of conflict are totally ignored in favour of describing a few of the symptoms. The *Our Failing Neighbour* report, which provided the initial blueprint for the intervention elaborates a little more on the perceived causes of conflict in the Solomon Islands:

> The weak post-independence governments with inadequate revenue bases struggling for legitimacy against older, more deeply rooted political and social traditions. The poor economic performance and high population growth that fuels disappointed expectations and tensions over

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⁷⁷ RAMSI, *Why RAMSI was formed* [online], [http://www.ramsi.org/about/history.html](http://www.ramsi.org/about/history.html), accessed September 6 2012
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land. The tribal differences sparking violence on a level that challenges the capacity and authority of the state. The state’s role replaced by non-state actors working with or without the trappings of constitutional office. The rule of law collapsing, and the descent into corruption and criminality.78

No mention is made of the demands articulated by the Guadalcanal Provincial Council, nor of the grievances that previous social movements articulated and clearly animated many people. Hameiri extrapolates and explains how RAMSI's interpretation of the causes of conflict are based on a homogenised notion of 'state-failure', defined by the absence or poor functioning of “universally valid governance institutions.”79 As Allen observes: “there is a potent danger in portraying the conflict solely in terms of greed and criminality, which is the interpretation which appears to have informed the architecture and approach of RAMSI.”80 The danger is precisely that the inequalities will be perpetuated, further fuelling grievances and undermining long-term stability.

Conclusion

The historical causes of conflict are multiple and complex. I do not attempt to authoritatively or objectively state the definite causes of conflict, I merely wish to illuminate some of the various causes, as articulated by various actors throughout the history of the Solomon Islands, and show that they can not be reduced to ethnic conflict, poor economic growth or a simple lack of ‘good governance’ structures in the neo-liberal mould. The picture painted by the historical narrative constructed in this chapter points to the overwhelmingly political causes of the conflict: inequitable development practices, the continued centralisation of political power and the continued supremacy of western forms of governance over recognition of kastom and tradition.

78 Elsina Wainwright. *Our Failing Neighbour*, p.18
79 Shahar Hameiri. ‘The Trouble with RAMSI: Reexamining the Roots of Conflict in the Solomon Islands’ *Contemporary Pacific* 19, no.9 (2007): 409-441 p.423
In chapter one I reviewed the relevant literature about neo-liberalism in Australian foreign policy and argued that RAMSI's programme is based upon a neo-liberal institutionalist set of prescriptions for functioning statehood. In chapter two, the specifics of RAMSI's reform agenda were examined. There is no room, either in neo-liberal ideology, or in RAMSI's agenda, for intervention around the issues raised in this chapter, specifically to uphold collective land rights, consider tradition or custom in policy making spaces, direct development in an equitable fashion, or to devolve (or even democratise) political power. This is why RAMSI’s programs have had to ignore the root causes of conflict; acknowledging the fundamental grievances that led to conflict is incompatible with RAMSI's driving ideology and programme. The obvious danger here is that these grievances will remain unresolved and even exasperated by the neo-liberal straight-jacket that RAMSI is placing on Solomon Islands institutions. In the next chapter I examine some specific instances where RAMSI has not only ignored the root causes of conflict but is actually replicating dynamics within the political economy of the Solomon Islands that led to conflict in 1998 and could forseeably lead to further conflict in the future.
4. RAMSI and the Perpetuation of Instability

Introduction

Development failures and instability in the South Pacific cannot be reduced to problems of governance; they can however be analysed as questions of political economy. There is a radical disconnect between the neo-liberal economic model of private sector-led growth regulated by a state based on 'good governance' and the economic reality of island states in the Pacific. In reality, the creation of institutions supportive of market societies is no guarantee that private sector investment will occur or that if it does that it will be in enterprises that are sustainable, equitable or respectful of local contexts.

Perhaps the most obvious failing of RAMSI, even within the definition of a neo-liberal programme, is that the private sector has not come to the rescue of poor people, provided equitable development or security. Growth in GDP has remained at 5 per cent or higher since the RAMSI intervention, with the exception of 2009, when GDP shrunk by 1.2 per cent amidst the global financial crisis, in 2011 GDP grew by 10.7 per cent,¹ which could perhaps be taken as a sign of the success of RAMSI. However, the majority of this growth is underpinned by the agricultural sector – as of 2011, agriculture accounted for 54.3 per cent of GDP² – which includes both subsistence agriculture, the antithesis of the private sector, and forestry. The economic 'success' of RAMSI is then revealed to be based mainly on a new boom in logging. The main effects of the transformation described in chapter two, have been

² Asian Development Bank. Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific – Solomon Islands
to recreate and accentuate the conditions that led to the outbreak of violent conflict in 1998 and hence undermine the stated objectives of stability and security. Instead, RAMSI is facilitating processes of primitive accumulation and constructing a new Australian hegemony in the South Pacific.

This chapter focuses on three key areas of the political economy in the Solomon Islands in which the effects of RAMSI's reforms has been to perpetuate the fundamental grievances which led to the outbreak of conflict in 1998. The aid bubble associated with RAMSI has created an inflationary economy and a concentration of services in Honiara, exacerbating problems of inequality. Logging is the largest industry in the Solomon Islands and has been largely responsible for recent economic growth; however, it is dangerously unsustainable and without regulation will collapse within the next five years. The political economy of land rights and development, as I argued in chapter three, was largely responsible for the outbreak of tensions and while significant pressure exists for land reform, especially from the World Bank and neo-liberal think-tanks in Australia, the issue has largely been ignored by RAMSI. Although neo-liberal reforms around land-rights are not being seriously considered by RAMSI, neither has there been an attempt to resolve the significant tension between land rights as understood traditionally and under the modern state as well as significant discontent about continued inequitable development. Such tension and discontent, left unaddressed, could foreseeably erupt into renewed conflict. The contradiction highlighted here is that the economic and governance reforms that RAMSI advocates have had the consequence, intended or otherwise, of re-creating the same grievances led to the outbreak of conflict in 1998.
4. RAMSI and the Perpetuation of Instability

Aid Bubble

The strategy described in the chapter two of focusing on building the capacity of institutions and creating regulation, while largely excluding direct development of infrastructure and industry has resulted in the creation of what Anderson has called the ‘aid bubble’ in Honiara. This presents three related problems: “an inflationary ‘enclave bubble economy’, failures in human and institutional capacity building and relative deprivation.”¹ Essentially this means that as highly paid (mostly Australian) expatriate consultants create an economic bubble in Honiara, inflationary pressures disproportionately affect locals who receive relatively low wages. Discontent directed at RAMSI reflects this inequality. Alarmingly, inequality and the lack of equitable development were two of the key grievances that fuelled the militants who began fighting in 1998 and RAMSI seems to be exacerbating these issues, pointing to the likelihood of further conflict in the future.

Logging and Forests

In chapter two, I examined how the logging boom of the 1990s had facilitated the creation of vast patronage networks through the distribution of cash from logging companies, both providing the funding for many 'big men' to run election campaigns and the cash that politicians distributed in order to buy loyalties and placate dissent. I also argued that the reduction in log exports and cash following the Asian Financial Crisis, led to at least the partial collapse of these patronage networks and politicians' ability to placate dissent. This has been identified by many authors as one of the primary proximate triggers of conflict in 1998.²

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² For example see Shahar Hameiri. 'Mitigating the risk to primitive accumulation: State-building and the Logging Boom in the Solomon Islands' *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 42, no.3 (2012): 405-426 and Matthew Allen. 'Long Term Engagement: The Future of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands', *Strategic Insights* 51, Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2011
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It is particularly concerning that the recent economic growth in the Solomon Islands, seen as RAMSI's biggest 'success' after ending armed conflict, is based on another, even bigger boom in the logging industry. Hameiri's work has shown that although foreign investment increased from US$41 million to US$303 million in the year following the implementation of the *Foreign Investment Act 2005*: of the 38 new investments registered for the period between June 2006 and August 2007, the majority were in services industries in Honiara that presumably are intended to cater mainly for well-paid international staff. Yet, the seven new investments made in the forestry sector in that period, which were among a handful that actually increased productive output, had a value of approximately US$11.37 million out of US$41.47 million for all new investments, or 27%. The list of foreign investment re-registration – investments made by companies already operating – is even more heavily skewed towards the forestry industry with about 82% of the total going into either old-growth forest logging or plantation-logging ventures.

By 2010 logging had grown to account for “60 per cent of total merchandise exports, 16 per cent of government revenue and 16 per cent of GDP.” Meaning that, in as far as RAMSI has been successful in facilitating private sector growth, this has largely been confined to one particular industry, a risky position at the best of times, even if the that particular industry did not rely on a strictly non-renewable resource in short supply.

As of 2010 it was estimated that the rate of logging was at six times the sustainable yield and at this rate it is estimated the resources will be totally depleted by 2015. In 2011, log exports exceeded 1.9 million cubic meters, up by one third from 2010. While this is recognised as a serious problem by donors, such as the Asian Development Bank and AusAID, the strategy of “improving the environment for doing business” and “promoting the private sector”, presumably in the hope that

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5 *The Facilitation of International Investment* act was one of the primary self identified successes of the Economic Governance and Growth pillar of RAMSI.
6 Shahar Hameiri. 'Mitigating the risk to primitive accumulation' p.421
7 Shahar Hameiri. 'Mitigating the risk to primitive accumulation' p.415
8 Matthew Allen. 'Long Term Engagement'
the private sector will diversify away from logging, remains ubiquitous and has only facilitated further investment in the logging industry. Given the immanent end of the logging industry, either as costs increase and volumes decrease, if sustainable logging is implemented, or when commercially viable forests are extinguished, the logging boom is set to burst, as it did in 1997-1998. It is likely that RAMSI will lose much of its legitimacy as economic growth collapses and again, it will become harder to placate dissent and renewed conflict is likely. As Hameiri has articulated:

Through encouraging unsustainable development of fisheries and forests, centralisation of services in Honiara, 'money politics' and strong links between business and government, RAMSI is in danger of reproducing many of the same conflicts over resources that has characterised violence in colonial and post-colonial Solomon Islands, including the failure of the Government in 2003.11

While much attention is given to the 'sustainability' of reforms implemented with RAMSI's assistance,12 there seems to be far less concern about the sustainability of the environment or economy without which a return to violence seems far more likely. This is arguably the most concerning aspect of the governance transformations under-way: that focus and resources have shifted onto regulation and institutions while viable strategies for avoiding future conflict, equitable development and reconciliation are ignored.

One neo-liberal solution to the issue of deforestation (and global climate change) that is being proposed by various actors, particularly the UN and the World Bank, is REDD+ (Reducing Emissions form Deforestation and Degradation Plus). REDD+ involves forest conservation initiatives in the global south, funded by the sale of carbon credits which are traded and sold to polluters and institutions in the global north.13 The UN-REDD Programme started a national

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12 Sue Emmott, Manuhuia Barcham & Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, *Annual Performance Report 2010*
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programme for REDD+ readiness in 2011, focusing on the early stages of creating a carbon market, particularly stakeholder consultation, collecting forest data, and crating plans for future projects.\textsuperscript{14} The UN-REDD Programme is also aiming towards a regional (PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) approach to the regulation of measurement, reporting and verification systems.\textsuperscript{15} Dehm explains how, similar to all neo-liberal markets:

\begin{quote}
carbon markets are dependant upon the state for specific functions, namely the creation of new forms of carbon property and the enforcement of rights in these and the enforcement of contracts, without which carbon markets could not exist.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

At the international level this means:

\begin{quote}
an internationally harmonised regulatory framework and market surveillance system, including a unified legal, accounting and taxation framework, stricter access to registry accounts to prevent fraud, greater transparency, sanctions to discourage market abuse, market surveillance authority and greater coordination with upcoming markets.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

In turn these state functions depend upon the kind of good governance, capacity-building, and law and order that RAMSI is attempting to implement in the Solomon Islands. In particular, they are reliant on political stability and an institutional structure that regulates for the production and maintenance of markets. Thus RAMSI provides a critical link between subsistence farmers and the global economy, enabling the continuation of privatisation and financialisation critical for capitalist reproduction.

The one element critical to REDD+ which is not fully addressed by RAMSI is the issue of land tenure. Initial investigation by the UN had found that current systems of traditional land tenure are a major constraint to similar development projects:

\begin{quote}
The prevailing traditional system of landownership provides a welfare safety net for the vast majority of Solomon Islanders. Customary land tenure also supports the country's robust
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} UN-REDD Programme, \textit{Initial National Programme Document – Solomon Islands}, p.15
\textsuperscript{17} Julia Dehm. 'Tricks of Perception and Perspective', p.13
village-based subsistence gardening. At the same time, customary ownership is regarded as a major constraint to large-scale development. Often it is problematic, costly and fraught with uncertainty due to the inevitable and often multiple disputes that arise between owners and developers, or between different landowner groups. Equally problematic is when the land is set aside for other public purposes, such as management of watersheds, protection of sites of special interest, or conserving environmentally-sensitive areas. While the national government has the power of compulsory land acquisition, using this power is regarded as undermining values of customary right of the people and gains political unpopularity.  

In practice, the creation of carbon markets, specifically those based on REDD+, will require land tenure that is individual, tradeable and has clear geographic and legal boundaries and therefore will require land reform according to the neo-liberal model.  

**Land**  

Land tenure is often one of the most controversial issues in post-colonial states as struggles between ‘tradition’ – represented by communal, inalienable and often un-codified systems of land tenure – and ‘modernity’ – represented by individual, marketised, and codified systems – play out, often resulting in violent conflict. As I showed in chapter two, a slightly different version of struggles over land rights was one of the primary causes of conflict – as traditional Guale land was alienated by the state and immigrant labourers. Therefore, a clarification of land rights and tenure has often been cited as one of the primary ingredients necessary for reconciliation and avoiding future conflict. Conflicting with this need to ‘clarify’ land tenure in the name of reconciliation is the neo-liberal desire for land reform; that is, to legislate for individual and tradeable land rights.

RAMSI hasn't attempted any large scale reform of land-rights, considering it outside its mandate. This is probably also because RAMSI officials are aware of the potential dissent such a process would likely create. Nevertheless, RAMSI has introduced individual legal land titles into rural areas, where previously only customary and collective land rights existed. Drumgold mentions one

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18 UN-REDD Programme. *Initial National Programme Document – Solomon Islands*, pp.9-10
19 Tim Anderson. 'RAMSI: Intervention, Aid Trauma and Self Governance', p.81
20 Elsina Wainwright. 'How is RAMSI faring? Progress, Challenges and Lessons Learned', *Strategic Insights* 14, Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2005, p.10
specific case from Ruaniu where the Solomon Islands Development Authority gave title over a coconut plantation to an Australian company without the knowledge of the traditional owners, resulting in a protracted legal battle which was only resolved (or forgotten) after the 2006 riots in Honiara.  

The decision by RAMSI that land reform is not part of its mandate is seen as one of its primary failings by neo-liberal scholars and think-tanks in Australia. Sodhi best represents this position. For him and the Centre for Independent Studies, the largest problem is that 85 per cent of Solomon Islanders still survive on subsistence farming, instead of participating in the cash economy, and land reform is the mechanism by which neo-liberalising projects seek to turn subsistence communities into cash economies. In Sodhi's words:

Agriculture is the key to raising rural living standards, and land tenure is the key impediment to raising agricultural output and incomes. Without land surveys, registration, and long-term leases there can be no progress.

Sodhi cites reports by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank that support his position that "traditional land tenure" is a "constraint on growth." Sodhi doesn't stop at traditional forms of land tenure but also explicitly identifies traditional family structures as 'constraints on growth':

The wontok system has long been recognised as a constraint on commercial activity, as it stifles incentives to increase production and seek income earning opportunities. […] All traditional societies have had similar informal welfare systems. As coffee, cocoa and palm oil production developed, welfare systems eroded. Economic policies that achieved growth overcame disincentives to work.

Such quintessentially neo-liberal views ignore two of the major causes of conflict in the Solomon Islands, mentioned in chapter two: struggles for the recognition of Kastom and traditional ways of

23 Gaurav Sodhi. 'Five Out of Ten', p.9&19
24 Gaurav Sodhi. 'Five Out of Ten', p.12
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life and the fight for land rights. The kind of primitive accumulation and epistemic violence Sodhi proposes has the real potential to reignite conflict as people become alienated from their land and supportive family structures.

Given the trajectory of neo-liberalism and the support for land reform from influential politicians, neo-liberal academics, think tanks as well as organisations such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, not to mention private companies, it seems inevitable that some kind of land reform initiative will be embarked upon in the future. This could provide a trigger for further conflict. If my speculations here are proven wrong and a push towards formalised individual and marketised land tenure does not develop, the point remains that a clarification of land tenure is still needed for purposes of reconciliation and stability. The fundamental confusion over land rights and processes of land alienation that contributed to conflict in 1998-2003 remain unresolved and so the potential for renewed conflict remains.

Conclusion

Economic growth in the Solomon Islands is based upon commercial logging, aid flows and the services bubble in Honiara. There are other avenues for development, however many of them are not particularly promising. The Gold Ridge gold mine has resumed production and will provide a small amount of export earnings. Agriculture including fisheries, palm oil and coconut plantations and tourism also make small contribution to GDP and export earnings which could grow. Carbon trading and REDD+ programmes also provide small hope, not just of economic recovery but of environmental conservation, however the international market is small, uncertainty abounds and already the Solomon Islands is a latecomer. One often cited solution to poverty is to open Australia's labour market to the South Pacific. All of these options, especially to the extent they promote
primitive accumulation and proletarianisation, are problematic because they have the potential to cause further conflict over land rights and equitable development, issues which must be resolved first, as the foundation for economic growth rather than as a side thought. Therefore, Australian foreign policy needs to shift its focus away from governance and marketisation onto direct equitable development that provides security and poverty reduction at a grass-roots level, while addressing the specific causes of conflict, if it is to achieve the goal of stability and security in the region.

This brief analysis of key issues in Solomon Islands political economy reveals that RAMSI is perpetuating the underlying issues which caused the outbreak of conflict in 1998. Fundamental uncertainty and confusion persists around the issues of land tenure and land rights, which are caught in a deadlock between neo-liberal reformers and advocates of *kastom*; the logging industry and 'aid bubble' continue the trend towards greater economic inequality and the centralisation of political and economic power in the hands of Honiara elites, foreign bureaucrats and investors. Combine this analysis with the evidence presented in chapter two that RAMSI's neo-liberal model of state-building is not only devaluing and de-legitimising traditional forms of governance but also centralising power and insulating decision-making from popular influence and the picture is one of a perfect storm. Rather than achieving its goals of stability and security, RAMSI is perpetuating instability in the Solomon Islands.
Conclusions

I have presented a view of neo-liberalism in this thesis as a kind of teleological imperative. The neo-liberal path to development and security follows a prescribed model that needs to be insulated from popular influence. The all important terminus of neo-liberalism is the creation of neo-liberal states, institutions and markets which support private sector led economic growth and free trade. However, in order to justify this model of politics, grand narratives about the failures of other systems must be constructed. In the case of the Solomon Islands, this narrative was about the outbreak of conflict which is said to be caused by corruption, poor governance, ethnic rivalries and stagnant economic growth. This formed part of and was in turn influenced by imaginations of an 'arc of instability' in the South Pacific (and also extending to Indonesia and Timor Leste) and a global order dominated by 'the war on terror'. Although, this would suggest that RAMSI is designed to provide security and stability for the region, I argue that, regardless of intention, it is more concerned with marketisation and privitisation of society in the Solomon Islands and building the institutions which facilitate such processes.

A long line of social movements, politicians and the militias themselves have consistently agitated around a fairly consistent set of issue-areas, which I identify as: inequitable development, land rights, the subordination of kastom, and the location of political power. RAMSI has done nothing to address these fundamental grievances in the Solomon Islands and thereby left the door open for renewed conflict around these issues after its guarantee of peace – provided by police and military – leave. In stark contrast, RAMSI and the Australian government have misrepresented the causes of
conflict to fit their neo-liberal ideology and programme to be centred around the lack of 'good governance' structures, poor economic growth and ethnic rivalries.

Through this reinterpretation of conflict, RAMSI has framed recovery and peace in the Solomon Islands as conditional upon private-sector-led economic growth and the good governance structures which supposedly support it. However, there are serious indications that RAMSI has not only ignored the causes of conflict but that its good governance reforms are actually exacerbating these issues. Modern Western rationalities of government have firmly established supremacy over traditional models. Political power is being further removed from popular influence as bureaucrats and politicians instead become accountable to transnational actors. Development patterns are at the mercy of the private sector, wealth is concentrated in the hands of elites and inequality has deepened. The end of the logging boom is imminent, either as sustainable practices are implemented, which would both decrease log volumes and increase costs, or when all of the commercially viable forest is depleted.

The outlook for long term stability in the Solomon Islands is depressing. Where the private sector has invested in the Solomon Islands, it has not created sustainable or equitable growth, instead it has aggravated inequality and brought forests to the brink of exhaustion. This is precisely the danger with neo-liberal development – the private sector seeks to maximise its own profit and has no investment in the long or medium-term stability or security of the majority of people. If the analysis presented in this thesis is accurate, there is much cause for pessimism. When the logging industry collapses so too will the entire economy. Without an economic base, RAMSI's work, including the peace it has presided over, will fail to provide the stability or security that was its reason for existence.
Conclusions

As a case study, RAMSI represents the ideology and agenda of Australian foreign policy in the South Pacific, albeit the most interventionist example. Similar patterns of neo-liberal reform are evident in Pacific-wide projects such as the Pacific Plan and negotiations for a free trade area. Each is contributing to the emergence of regulatory regionalism in the Pacific, however it is during crisis situations that Australian foreign policy is able to have the largest impact, as can be seen in specific Pacific states, especially Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Nauru and most obviously, Solomon Islands. Australian foreign policy is not achieving the stated objectives of stability and security but rather is facilitating processes of primitive accumulation and establishing an Australian hegemony within the region.

Several questions remain to be answered: how deep and widespread is the transformation in the Solomon Islands as a result of RAMSI’s presence? How many of the reforms are directed from Canberra, or are of indigenous origin or originate from other actors? How widely held are grievances and demands about land rights, recognition of traditional forms of governance, inequitable development and devolution of political power in the Solomon Islands today? Are there other significant players in society who influence the process, perhaps churches, trade unions and political parties? Why and when will the 'private sector' arrive in a meaningful way? And, how long will RAMSI stay in the Solomon Islands?

Australian foreign policy makers, including security and aid policy makers, need to take into account a broader range of causes of conflict in order to address structural insecurity in the South Pacific. This probably entails dropping a rigid adherence to neo-liberalism as a framework for security, development and state-building. Instead the focus should be on the needs and desires of
grass-roots communities. Creating security and equitable development from the bottom up provides strong foundations for regional stability and Australian security. The primary example of failing to do this was when a small group of aggrieved fighters who formed the IFM on an island in the South Pacific were eventually viewed as a threat to the security of the whole South Pacific region.
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