1. Co-operative Intervention: police-led, military-backed intervention; what we can learn from the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands

**RAMSI has normalized intervention as policy in the international affairs of the Pacific islands. The troubles in Solomon Islands may well return, and Australia should be ready to respond.**

**Future Pacific interventions are likely to bring together the joint resources of Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands countries, and they are likely to occur in circumstances like those of Solomon Islands, where a beleaguered government calls for foreign assistance widely desired by its population, rather than those of Fiji, where deep internal divisions make uncontested intervention impossible.**

Numbering 2,300 personnel led by Australia and New Zealand, and including forces from nine other Pacific states, RAMSI entered the country in July 2003, as a police-led, military-backed intervention mission. RAMSI proved highly successful in restoring law and order, and moved then to improving economic governance and the machinery of government. Over time RAMSI assumed responsibility for a wide variety of tasks, best described as ‘building the state’: strengthening the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force and the justice and correctional systems; improving financial management by government; enhancing the capacity of the Solomon Islands Public Service; combating corruption; improving the rights and opportunities of women; and consulting with Solomon Islanders through an outreach programme.

After 10 years in Solomon Islands, RAMSI was largely withdrawn. The Combined Task Force from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga left Solomon Islands in 2013. The civilians who delivered aid through RAMSI were transferred to bilateral programmes, and RAMSI itself became a mission focused solely on improving the
performance of the Solomon Islands police force. Final judgement about the intervention cannot yet be reached. An independent report concluded in 2014 that the RAMSI decade ‘has, for many among the educated elite, been seen as one of indigenous quiescence or passivity, with key tasks being left to outsiders to resolve’. Yet most Solomon Islanders, when polled, overwhelmingly approve of the mission. They express little faith in their own police and would prefer the foreign police to remain. In one sense, these assessments point to RAMSI’s success in imposing law and order and administering justice impartially. In another, they suggest that the fundamental divisions that caused the crisis in the first place are not yet resolved, and that foreign security involvement of some kind may be needed for years to come if the country is not to relapse into lawlessness. Given the uncertain economic future of Solomon Islands, the tropical forests of which will soon be exhausted, such a relapse is a distinct possibility.

The Biketawa Declaration gave RAMSI a diplomatic imprimatur. The regional statement of principles that provided justification for RAMSI is the Biketawa Declaration, signed by PNG and all other Forum states in 2000. The Declaration, drawn up a few months after a coup in Fiji and the forcible removal of a government in Solomon Islands, commits Forum countries to certain motherhood principles, beginning with good governance and including “belief in the liberty of the individual under the law” and “the peaceful transfer of power, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government”. More importantly, the Declaration recognises “the vulnerability of member countries to threats to their security, broadly defined, and the importance of cooperation among members in dealing with such threats when they arise” and provides for graduated steps that the Forum might take in response “in time of crisis” in a member state. The Declaration did not specify armed intervention of the kind that transpired in Solomon Islands in 2003, but provided for consultation by Forum ministers and “targeted measures”, and when the time came its language was general enough to provide legal cover for the regional intervention.¹ Regional security in the Pacific implies the internal security of Pacific states, not only in Solomon Islands but also in its far larger neighbour PNG.

Pacific island states support Biketawa in the interests of regional security and Australia and New Zealand make it a key element of the missions of their defence forces. Alluding to the

possibility of future interventions, Australia’s National Security Statement of 2008 argued that ‘Australia has made major long-term commitments to help resolve conflict in Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste. But the risk of fragile states disrupting stability and prosperity in our region is an ongoing challenge.’ The 2013 Australian Defence White Paper declared that after the defence of Australia from attack, ‘the second priority task for the ADF [Australian Defence Force] is to contribute to stability and security in the South Pacific and Timor-Leste. This involves defence co-operation with these countries and the conduct of military operations with others as required.’ The White Paper foresaw the future possibility of ‘stability operations such as those we have led in Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands’, requiring sustained deployments by the ADF.

In a similar vein, the 2010 New Zealand Defence White Paper described one of the principal tasks of the New Zealand Defence Force as being ‘to contribute to and, where necessary, lead peace and security operations in the South Pacific’. Contending that ‘the outlook for the South Pacific over the next 25 years is one of fragility’, the White Paper declared that New Zealand would ‘continue to contribute to stability, capacity strengthening and economic development’ in the region, together with ‘regional maritime surveillance, search and rescue, humanitarian aid and disaster relief when required’. Since 2011 New Zealand Defence Force personnel have been deployed alongside Australians in the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) Ready Response Force, which is designed to intervene rapidly in security or humanitarian emergencies in the Pacific islands.

2. What we should do for Papua New Guinea

*Australia should expand its DCP with PNG, because the planned expansion of the PNGDF to 5,000 by 2017 and 10,000 by 2030 might well lead a splintering of the force into factions supported and financed by politicians, especially if there were a repeat of the 2011-12 scenario where PNG had competing Prime Ministers and Police Commissioners.*

As the PNG Defence White Paper says, “PNG’s current and future security challenges are complex, non-traditional and predominantly developmental in nature”. A bigger, better equipped and more tightly disciplined PNGDF would contribute to a security solution for PNG but only in certain areas such as border control, light weapons proliferation, security for

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major events and effective surveillance of the country’s EEZ. At the same time, participation in regional and global peacekeeping has the potential to enhance PNG’s international reputation. But as the Government of PNG recognises, much else is needed, including a better trained and equipped police force, and a rescue mission for the health system. PNG is a country where planning trumps implementation, and where statements of policy and white papers promise more than is delivered. That is all the more reason for the DCP with PNG to be enhanced.

The Joint Declaration of Principles of 1987 requires Australia and PNG to “consult about matters affecting their common security in the event of external armed attack threatening the national sovereignty of either country” and is interpreted on both sides as an undertaking, falling somewhat short of a cast-iron guarantee, that Australia would come to the defence of PNG.³ Under the security provisions of the Joint Declaration for a New Papua New Guinea-Australia Partnership, signed in 2013, bilateral defence relations will deepen and Australia will do more to strengthen the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF).

The Government of PNG has now taken a further step and produced the country’s first ever National Security Policy together with the first Defence White Paper since 1999. The government proposes to more than double the size of the PNGDF, from 2,000 to 4,000 regular personnel and 1,000 reserves by 2017, with a further doubling to 10,000 by 2030.⁴

According to the White Paper, the core tasks of the PNGDF are to defend PNG against attack and maintain the integrity of its sovereign land, air and maritime borders; to provide civil emergency assistance in security, humanitarian and disaster relief; to engage in nation building; and to participate in international operations in both war zones and humanitarian

Australia is the defence partner that really matters for PNG. On her visit to PNG in 2013 Julia Gillard joined Peter O’Neill in signing the Joint Declaration for a New Papua New Guinea-Australia Partnership, which includes a commitment to strengthen the “enduring defence relationship” between the two countries and deepen bilateral cooperation on maritime and border security, regional peacekeeping and disaster relief. In financial terms these words mean that Australia will spend more on its defence cooperation program with PNG, already its largest with any country and boosted significantly to AUD $27 million in

The extra funds over the coming years will pay for more Australian Defence Force officers to be deployed to Port Moresby, where they will work alongside their PNGDF counterparts as advisers and trainers at a time when the force plans on rapid expansion. The new emphasis on the defence relationship was underscored at the first bilateral defence ministers’ meeting between the two countries in Canberra in December 2011, when they agreed on an annual PNG-Australia security dialogue involving senior defence and foreign affairs officials.

3. What we should do to enhance Pacific Islands maritime security

*Operation SOLANIA contributes to a wider multi-national program to provide maritime surveillance support in the Pacific, coordinated by the Quadrilateral Defence Coordinating Group. Members of the Quadrilateral Defence Coordinating Group are Australia, New Zealand, France and the US. ADF assets, including AP-3C Orions and Royal Australian Naval Ships are dedicated to Operation SOLANIA tasking on a periodic basis. But more is needed, because maritime security is the key issue for the majority of small Island states in the Pacific, in particular the economic defence of their EEZs.*

Fisheries are a major resource for Pacific island countries and territories. All have declared EEZs in their surrounding waters and because of the dispersal of islands in Pacific states, their areas of maritime jurisdiction are vast. For example, the EEZ of the Cook Islands, which has a population of 15,000, extends over 1.8m. sq km of ocean. At the same time, global oceanic fisheries are being exhausted, and the Pacific Ocean is among the last maritime areas with considerable fish stocks, especially migratory tuna. The protection of the Pacific’s maritime jurisdictions from illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing is therefore a security issue for the Pacific islands. The Pacific islands, working together with Australia and New Zealand, have responded to this security challenge in a number of ways.

The first has been to reach agreements with distant water fishing nations such as the USA, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, and to establish a fisheries regime through a long-established body, the Forum Fisheries Agency, and a newer organization, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. These are tasked with surveillance of fishing areas through a vessel monitoring system. Licensed fishing vessels in Pacific waters carry an

Automatic Location Communicator, which sends information about their location and heading to the Forum Fisheries Agency in Solomon Islands.

The second Pacific response is to enforce fisheries regimes, a daunting task for small, poor island states acting on their own, but made easier by the 22 Pacific Patrol Boats supplied by Australia to 12 Pacific island states. They are accompanied by Maritime Surveillance Advisers and Technical Advisors. The Pacific Patrol Boats will begin retiring from service in 2018, although in 2013 Australia announced a replacement scheme, the Pacific Maritime Security Programme. Effective surveillance and enforcement also requires aircraft patrols, and these are supplied by the four countries of the Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group (Australia, New Zealand, France and the USA). One-quarter of the total annual air time of the New Zealand Defence Force, for example, is spent flying over the EEZs of Pacific Islands Forum states. Australia has promised an increased commitment to maritime surveillance, including a one-year trial using chartered aircraft.

PNG’s vast maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is 3.1 million square kilometres in extent and includes seven maritime borders. One estimate is that PNG loses one billion kina (AUD $500 million) annually in fishing revenue as a result of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in this zone. Like other Pacific countries, PNG has used Pacific Patrol Boats donated by Australia to police its EEZ, and will do so in the future now that Australia has announced the Pacific Maritime Security Program, which aims to provide an updated version of the patrol boat program from 2018. Under the old scheme, Australia funded refits of the boats and brought crews to the Australian Maritime College for training, as well as supplying Navy personnel as advisers. Under the new program, Pacific EEZ surveillance might be directed by a regional maritime coordination centre based in Solomon Islands, but whatever form it takes, PNG’s ageing patrol boats will be replaced.

The USA has recently intensified its involvement in Pacific fisheries regime enforcement. ‘Ship-rider’ agreements have been signed between the US Coast Guard and the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, the Marshall Islands, Tonga, the Cook Islands and Kiribati, enabling Pacific island law enforcement officers to travel on Coast Guard vessels in order to board suspect foreign fishing vessels. The USA is likely to expand its ship-rider programme as part of its renewed engagement with the region.

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An example of co-ordinated surveillance and enforcement of Pacific fisheries regimes is Operation Kurukuru, conducted annually by the Forum Fisheries Agency Regional Fisheries Surveillance Centre in Honiara, Solomon Islands. Australia, New Zealand, France and the USA deploy vessels and aircraft to support Pacific patrol boats in the search for poachers. In 2013 the Operation resulted in the boarding of 111 fishing vessels and covered the EEZs of the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, a vast area of 30 million square kilometres.

Future deep sea mining of ocean floor metal deposits may increase the need to secure the maritime boundaries of Pacific island states. Nautilus Minerals, a Canada-based company specializing in seabed mining, was planning in 2014 to begin mining the seabed of the Bismarck Sea in Papua New Guinea and to expand its ocean floor exploration operations into Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Zealand. The Cook Islands possesses deposits of cobalt, nickel and copper in its EEZ, and gold and silver are believed to be present elsewhere on the Pacific Ocean’s vast seabed. Politically contentious within some Pacific countries, such as Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, the issue of seabed mining has the potential to become a source of discord between these states once the mining companies commence operations.

4. What we should do about climate change in the Pacific.

_In order to be at all credible in the Pacific Islands region, the Defence White Paper needs to include an acknowledgement that the most serious security issues facing Pacific Island countries, especially atoll states, are climate change and rising sea levels. Many low-lying islands are experiencing climate change impacts on communities, infrastructure, water supply, coastal and forest ecosystems, fisheries, agriculture, and human health. The White Paper needs to remind people of what Australia is already doing (through the Pacific Sea Level Monitoring Project and so on) and propose new initiatives by which the ADF can assist in climate change adaptation (building of sea walls etc)._

If the predictions of climate scientists are borne out, climate change and rising seas present a security challenge to the Pacific islands greater than any other.

Climate change has focused international attention on some Pacific countries, such as Tuvalu and Kiribati, because it presents the possibility that rising sea levels might end the very
existence of a number of small sovereign states. Speaking alongside US Secretary of State John Kerry at an oceans conference in Washington in 2014, Kiribati President Anote Tong described climate change as ‘about the survival of our people’, a theme he has reiterated in recent years as the region’s best known climate activist. Given the dire predictions of inundation, Pacific island countries are active in international climate change diplomacy. All the Pacific island countries in the Pacific Islands Forum support the position of the Association of Small Island States, which is to renew the Kyoto Protocol and its binding provisions, and in 2014 the Pacific states Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands joined with the Maldives in the Indian Ocean to form the Coalition of Atoll Nations on Climate Change in order to press for urgent action in climate negotiations. Yes, some of this Island talk is bluster, but much of it is sensibly directed to what is likely to become the key security issue for the region.

Climate change financing is a major issue in the Pacific islands. Funds for climate adaptation reach the region from a wide variety of sources, ranging from the Kyoto Protocol Adaptation Fund, currently being accessed by Solomon Islands, to US government agencies, the European Commission, the Global Environment Facility, the World Bank and a large group of donor states. The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP), based in Samoa, points out that, although Pacific Islanders ‘have done little to contribute to the cause – less than 0.03% of current global greenhouse gas emissions – they are among the first to be affected. Most islands are experiencing climate change impacts on communities, infrastructure, water supply, coastal and forest ecosystems, fisheries, agriculture, and human health. The consequences of sea level rise, sea temperature increases, ocean acidification, altered rainfall patterns, and overall temperature rise will be increasingly felt.’ SPREP has undertaken a number of climate change adaptation projects, including the relocation of villages and the building of sea walls.

Climate change was the key issue at the 2013 meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum, the organisation of independent and self-governing Pacific states including Australia and New Zealand. The meeting was held in the Marshall Islands, a collection of atolls that would disappear beneath the sea if the worst predictions of climate scientists are realised, and it was there that the Forum adopted the Majuro Declaration on Climate Change. The Declaration – symbolic in nature rather than binding on member states – committed the region to climate leadership and asserted that climate change ‘is the greatest threat to the livelihoods, security
and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific and one of the greatest challenges for the entire world’.

Australia is a member of the Pacific Islands Forum but, as one of the world’s largest exporters of coal and gas, has different interests from Island countries. The Australian Government abolished a short-lived carbon tax in 2014 and is working with Canada in forming a group of states that will resist moves towards carbon pricing. Australia nevertheless funds the Pacific Sea Level Monitoring Project, which maintains a network of stations across the Pacific in order to ‘generate an accurate record of variance in long-term sea level for the South Pacific’. The participating countries are the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The complications of accurately measuring sea levels are considerable. Tide gauges can establish whether the sea is rising relative to the land, but not whether the land is sinking or rising, so it is necessary to establish absolute sea level change by reference to the centre of the earth using continuous global positioning system measurements. The El Niño phenomenon, when the warm waters of the equatorial Pacific flow to the east, can have the effect of reducing sea levels by as much as 30 cm, especially within the South Pacific Convergence Zone, which extends from Papua New Guinea to Samoa. Barometric pressure also has an effect, and a low pressure system will cause a rise in sea levels beneath it. While firm conclusions might be reached only over decades of measurement, a small sea level rise across the Pacific Ocean appears to have occurred already, and the possibility remains that populations of whole Pacific countries might one day need to be evacuated as climate change refugees.