

ARTICLE James Cotton  
Peacebuilding in the Pacific: the Australian military experience  
*Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development, Issue 14, July 2009*  
Available at [www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk](http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk)

## Peacebuilding in the Pacific: the Australian military experience

By James Cotton

**James Cotton** is Professor of Politics, University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra. His most recent books are: *East Timor, Australia and regional order: intervention and its aftermath in Southeast Asia* (Routledge Curzon, 2004) and (edited with John Ravenhill), *Trading on Alliance Security: Australia in World Affairs 2001-2005* (Oxford University Press/AIIA, 2007). In September-October 2009 he will be a Visiting Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington DC.

**ABSTRACT**

*The Australian Defence Force (ADF) is currently involved in peacebuilding operations in Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands; Australian government agencies remain engaged in reconstruction in post-conflict Bougainville (Papua New Guinea). Peacebuilding has been and will remain a major task for the ADF in the Pacific, as part of a larger governmental and aid response. The wider context for these commitments is the view that state incapacity or even failure is in prospect in parts of Australia's immediate Pacific region. The causes of state failure include lack of a diversified economy, a dependence on exports of natural resources, a rapidly growing population, and poor education levels; a number of Pacific countries exhibit these characteristics. The conflict on Bougainville has been the most intractable in which Australian forces have been involved. The formation of Peace Monitoring Groups (largely composed of ADF personnel, but unarmed) engaged in weapons destruction, building trust and encouraging the eventual realisation of local autonomy was a major contribution to the peace process. The ADF experience of Timor-Leste dates from INTERFET. The need to redeploy peacekeeping troops in 2006 demonstrated that the existing peacebuilding program focused especially on security sector reform, while positive was still too narrow to address governance incapacity problems. From 2003 ADF elements have been central to the RAMSI reconstruction program in Solomon Islands. Though violence has largely been eradicated, the political crisis of 2006 demonstrated the need for the closest cooperation with the host government. These regional case studies show that peacebuilding is a complex task which requires engagement across all of the institutions of order and governance as well as with the wider society. Security sector reform remains a crucial area of peacebuilding in which military forces are inextricably involved. However, effective security reform depends ultimately upon the existence of governments that welcome, support, and own such reform.*

## **Peacebuilding in the Pacific: the Australian military experience**

Australian defence planning and priorities have traditionally fluctuated between expeditionary and regional approaches. Following the Iraq experience, and given the grave difficulties confronting the current operations in Afghanistan, and especially in the context of a new national leadership with a declared interest in a stronger focus upon the nations of the West and South Pacific, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is expected now to play an enhanced role in Australia's immediate region.

The ADF has existing missions or commitments in Timor-Leste, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea (PNG), as well as in other Pacific nations through the Pacific Patrol Boat program. Members of other government agencies, including the Australian Federal Police and the Attorney-General's Department are also engaged in these nations as well as in Vanuatu, Tonga, Nauru and Fiji. Such regional commitments are likely to continue or to take on additional dimensions. Peacebuilding has been and will remain a major task for the ADF in the Pacific, as part of a larger governmental and aid response. The wider context for these commitments is the likelihood of state incapacity or even failure in the years ahead, a product, in addition to systemic problems, of the associated phenomena of resource depletion, environmental degradation and climate change, as well as continued population increase.

This paper will review the issue of state incapacity and the connection between incapacity and internal conflict. It will then discuss the ADF experience in stabilisation and peacebuilding in the region, with particular reference to the Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands and Bougainville (PNG) cases. Some conclusions will then be drawn on the possible future of the military in regional peace operations.

### **State failure in the Pacific**

In 2006 Australian military forces and other personnel were engaged in dealing with the consequences of rioting and disorder in the capitals of Timor-Leste, the Solomon Islands and Tonga.<sup>1</sup> After similar events in Suva, a coup by military commander Frank Bainimarama reversed a process of democracy restoration (in which Australia had been playing an encouraging role) in Fiji. In the same year the government of Nauru was only able to function on the basis of a subvention from Australia of over A\$20 million. Accordingly a debate has emerged regarding the applicability of notions of 'state failure' or state incapacity to some of the nations of the South and West Pacific, and, correspondingly, the role that Australia (and the Australian military) can or should play to mitigate the effects of that incapacity.

The notion of state failure is employed in several related but methodologically distinct senses. Perhaps the most common meaning relates to the inability of the state to generate consent and

---

<sup>1</sup> Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *Australia and the South Pacific. Rising to the Challenge*, ASPI Special Report Issue 12 (Canberra: ASPI, 2008).

compliance on the part of its citizenry.<sup>2</sup> What constitutes a failed state has varied somewhat according to theoretical perspective. It would seem that (setting aside 'predatory' failed states) the state atrophies, its revenues decline, its capacities diminish – and its place is taken by local civil society and/or 'traditional' hierarchies and/or international forces/agencies. Disorder, whether lower level or catastrophic, then ensues.

Why do states fail? There is an extensive comparative literature on the background factors (or triggers) which are present in states subject to endemic conflict. In an extended project conducted for the World Bank, Paul Collier and his co-authors have found that a country characterised by a lack of a diversified economy, a dependence on exports of natural resources, a rapidly growing population, poor education levels, and possessing a significant diaspora community beyond the boundaries of the state is very likely to experience serious internal disorder.<sup>3</sup> All of these triggers can be observed in the Pacific cases considered here: Timor-Leste, the Solomon Islands, and PNG. In Timor-Leste there is very little industry with the state being the largest employer of labour, the most important exported commodity is coffee (though oil revenues are the largest source of state income), and there are considerable émigré communities in Portugal and Australia (and since 1999 in West Timor). Moreover, Timor-Leste currently holds first place in the global natal stakes, each female of child-bearing age responsible for 7.8 births (a rate that if sustained would double the population inside 20 years). In the Solomon Islands, logging and fishing are the major non-subsistence economic activities; the former is far from sustainable with unlogged forests due to be cleared by around 2014. In the capital the largest employer of labour is the state, and youth unemployment is the norm. The PNG economy depends heavily upon mineral and resource exports for employment; around 40% of the population live on an income of less than A\$1 a day. Of these three nations, literacy is highest in PNG but at only 57% of the adult population. The populations of PNG and the Solomon Islands are also growing quickly at a rate of around 2.7% p.a.

Especially in light of the disorder of 2006, a debate has emerged in Australia on what has been termed the 'Africanisation' of the Southwest Pacific.<sup>4</sup> This categorisation has been extended beyond PNG and the Solomon Islands to embrace also Timor Leste (which in geography if not in endowments is part of Southeast Asia). Contributors to this debate have disputed the more general applicability of this syndrome of state failure, but there is a measure of agreement on the indicators of such a condition. In summary, they are: growing tensions between civil regimes and military

---

<sup>2</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, 'The New Nature of Nation-State Failure', *The Washington Quarterly*, 25(2002), no. 3, pp. 85-96.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler and Nicholas Sambanis, 'The Collier-Hoeffler Model of Civil War Onset and the Case Study Project Research Design', in P. Collier & N. Sambanis (eds), *Understanding Civil War: evidence and analysis* (Washington: World Bank, 2005), pp. 1-33.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Reilly, 'The Africanisation of the South Pacific', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 54(2000), no. 3, 261-68; Benjamin Reilly, 'State Functioning and State Failure in the South Pacific', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 58(2004), no. 4, pp. 479-493; Jon Fraenkel, 'The Coming Anarchy in Oceania? A Critique of the "Africanisation" of the South Pacific Thesis', *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 42(2004), no. 1, pp. 1-34.

forces; competition for natural resources between distinctive ethnic groups; weakness of government institutions; and the centrality of the state as a means to wealth and/or power.

Evidence for each of these four indicators can be readily found in these cases. Long-standing tensions between the police (PNTL) and the military (F-FDTL) in Timor-Leste and the use of these forces by antagonistic factions within the political elite, demonstrated fundamental disagreement on the locus of control of deadly force. As to the emergence of 'ethnic' divisions, the 'East' vs. 'West' (Lorosae vs. Loromonu; or Kaladi vs. Firaku), adverted to first by (then) President Gusmão on 23 March 2006, many of the 'gangs' that proliferated in Dili and were the chief actors in the violence that displaced so many of the city's inhabitants through that year openly affirmed their geographical identity. According to some interpretations, this 'ethnic' division has its roots in the resistance era, when FALINTIL operated mostly in the East and relied upon the populations there for support. By contrast, the more populous West was better integrated into Indonesian authority structures and the use of *bahasa* more prominent. Though this motive was not generally acknowledged there was clearly some elite manipulation of these developments with the prize undoubtedly access to the country's oil and gas riches.

In PNG the Bougainville conflict originated from the imposition from Port Moresby of mining development upon an island the population of which regarded themselves as of separate ethnic character. Attempts to impose 'order' then confirmed, for many of the people of Bougainville, the otherness of the state and its instruments. Such problems are also seen in the Solomon Islands, where the conflict may be traced to the influx of people from Malaita to the island of Guadalcanal (and site of the capital), and the resentment of the original population. Institutions of governance then began to reflect this division and correspondingly ceased to promote public order.

What of the resilience and transparency of governance institutions? In a report undertaken on the initiative of the Alkatiri government in Timor-Leste and presented to the (then) prime minister in January 2006, it is clear that parliamentary structures and conventions have been quite incapable of checking the activity of the executive, with parliament meeting infrequently, parliamentarians often absent, and a great reluctance of members to use their initiative independent of the inclinations of the cabinet.<sup>5</sup> In PNG though elections have been held regularly, corruption is widely encountered, election to political office is frequently only for a single term and is accompanied by the distribution of largesse to kinship groups. In the Solomon Islands, parliamentary government effectively collapsed, with the prime minister and governor general displaced at gun point in 2000 by rogue members of the police force.

Further, some generalisation can be applied to the role of the state in the economy. In Timor-Leste, the state sector is the major employer in the formal sector, and allegations of the manipulation of state contracts by Alkatiri family and other individuals connected with the former administration contributed to the disillusion and discontent that emerged in 2006. If the experience of other oil-wealthy non-industrialised states is any guide, control of oil and gas revenues will provide a major

---

5 Selver B. Sahin, 'Building the State in Timor-Leste', *Asian Survey* 47(2007), no. 2, pp. 250–267.

source of leverage for the state elite. In Bougainville state access to the royalties of the mining sector has been a major issue of contention. The Solomon Islands has depended for more than a generation on logging and, to a lesser extent on fishing. The timber industry has proven to be a major source of corruption, with lucrative government export licenses being granted on a corrupt basis. Fishing has also been corruptly licensed to foreign interests.

So far, the focus of the 'Africanisation' hypothesis has been upon social and political structures in the Western Pacific. But as politics is not necessarily always a dependent variable, policies chosen (or not chosen) by the incumbents of state office must also be a factor contributing to the popular attitude towards the state. A poorly performing state cannot expect popular compliance and/or legitimacy; poor performance may also produce the foot soldiers of disorder. The decision by the PNG government to direct most mining revenues outside Bougainville generated resentment; the conflict that erupted was then exacerbated by the use of the PNG Defence Force against militants on the island, members of the military committing many abuses. Poor development policies in the Solomon Islands did little to address youth unemployment or provide sustainable incomes outside of the subsistence sector; the decision by some political elites to seek diplomatic relations with Taiwan then introduced a further source of corruption. In Timor-Leste little so far has been done to address poor standards of nutrition and very high youth unemployment. Perhaps the most contentious and wasteful policy was the decision to maintain Portuguese as the official language, condemning all those inhabitants not conversant with the language (perhaps 85% of the people, and especially including the best educated of the younger generation) in effect to an incomplete exercise of their rights as full citizens. This decision hobbled the parliament, obstructed the functioning of the legal system and enmeshed the educational system in a linguistic farrago.

From the perspective of the 'Africanisation' debate, then, Timor-Leste's difficulties are comparable to those of the Solomon Islands. But Timor-Leste, while Africanised is hardly *African*. While more than 100,000 people were displaced from their homes at the height of the disorder, the total mortality of 2006 was less than 100, which is hardly comparable with such historical cases as Rwanda or even present-day Zimbabwe. In these cases the problems to be confronted are not of the mass humanitarian type found currently in Congo or Zimbabwe, rather they are reflected in the limited life chances and social alienation caused by inadequate health services, chronic unemployment, and poor or absent governance.

In a well-known and frequently up-dated international project, *Foreign Policy* in collaboration with the US Fund for Peace assesses the prospects of a number of political systems for state failure, employing 12 social, political and economic indicators.<sup>6</sup> The operating definition of this condition includes: loss by the state of physical control/monopoly of the use of legitimate force; erosion of authority to make collective decisions; inability to provide reasonable services; and inability to interact with other states. Reviewing the table of states most at risk, Timor-Leste is classified at 20, the Solomon Islands at 30 and PNG at 52. Given the influence of the notion of 'Africanisation' in the Pacific it should be noted that some 12 African states are assessed as at greater risk than Timor-

---

<sup>6</sup> Fund for Peace, in collaboration with Foreign Policy 2007, *Failed States Index 2007*:  
<http://www.fundforpeace.org/>.

Leste and some 16 African states more likely to exhibit symptoms of failure than the Solomon Islands. Nevertheless, given the isolation of the Western Pacific and the strategic (and historical) importance of these states for Australia, Canberra has become the peacebuilder of last resort in a region facing multiple economic, social and governmental challenges.<sup>7</sup>

### **Regional case studies**

The conflict on *Bougainville Island* in PNG has been the most intractable in which Australian forces have been involved; by some standards its eventual outcome has been the most successful in the Pacific region.<sup>8</sup> This conflict is in part a manifestation of the problems inherent in the post-colonial PNG state. These include arbitrary borders, the imposition essentially from without of state forms upon a complex subsistence society, and the divisive impact of intensive resource exploitation. The Panguna mine, extracting copper and gold from one of the world's largest deposits, was imposed on the local Bougainville population with little consultation and inadequate compensation; from 1988 it was the focus of a violent conflict which saw the effective withdrawal of the state, extensive casualties including many deaths and the internal displacement of about 60,000 (one-third of the population). An internal secessionist movement (the Bougainville Revolutionary Army) was at war with both the PNG Defence Force and competing local groups opposed to its policies or personnel. The humanitarian impact of the struggle grew as a result of a central government trade blockade as well as of the collapse of all public health and welfare services.

The first effort at a peace resolution was the negotiation process made possible by the South Pacific Peace Keeping Force constituted by personnel from New Zealand, Australia, Tonga, Fiji and Vanuatu. This initiative, though inconclusive, did provide all parties with insights into the full nature of the problem. Frustrated at the lack of progress, in 1997 the PNG government sought to arrange for mercenaries, recruited by Sandline, to be dispatched to Bougainville to achieve a 'military solution'. This development raised anxieties in Australia that a threshold had been reached that would see a more violent conflict with serious implications for the stability of PNG and also of the region. Already a trade in weapons had emerged between Bougainville and the closely neighbouring Solomon Islands. In the event, elements of the PNG military forced the government to abandon the Sandline venture; with New Zealand now taking the lead the peace process resumed.

Truce and peace monitoring arrangements brought the PNG government and the various Bougainville factions together; a Peace Monitoring Group (PMG) was established and the UN was invited to set up a small representative office (UNPOB) to facilitate the peace process. The 2001

---

<sup>7</sup> Ron J. May (ed.), *'Arc of Instability'. Melanesia in the Early 2000s* (Canberra: State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project, Australian National University and Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Regan, 'The Bougainville intervention: political legitimacy and sustainable peace-building', in Greg Fry & Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka (eds.), *Intervention and State-building in the Pacific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 184-208.

negotiated political settlement entailed a (postponed) referendum, local autonomy, and demilitarisation. The last task involved the withdrawal of the PNG Defence Force and the destruction of the many weapons that had come onto the island. The essential element in this (eventually successful) process was the PMG, a multi-national force (mostly military) from Australia, New Zealand, Vanuatu and Fiji. Of the total force of 300, about 260 were Australian, 240 being military personnel. It was charged with monitoring the truce and later with weapons disposal. The decision was taken to deploy this force without arms; as a degree of trust emerged the force was reduced from 300 to 75. Peacebuilding proved a protracted process; throughout it was facilitated by the practice of PMG teams living among the population, sharing sporting and entertainment activities and participating in many of the activities of daily life.<sup>9</sup> The process was largely funded and supported by Australia; including a post-conflict transitional presence and assistance with the subsequent 2005 Bougainville elections, the total cost has exceeded A\$250 million. The overall number of fatalities associated with the conflict is estimated at around 15,000. In 2004-2005 some 19 Australian police worked in Bougainville as part of the Australia-PNG Enhanced Cooperation Program but were withdrawn when that Program failed a legal challenge.

The Australian experience in *Timor-Leste* originated in the INTERFET mission of 1999, which was necessitated by the failure of Indonesia to consolidate the rule that had been exercised in the territory from December 1975. The principal components of the INTERFET force were Australian, with around 5000 ADF personnel serving at any given time. Australian based logistics, early-warning and theatre force protection were crucial. The force was charged (under a United Nations Chapter VII mandate) to restore peaceful conditions and protect the population, and where possible deliver relief and undertake urgent reconstruction.<sup>10</sup> Following INTERFET, Australian forces also provided key components of the military arm of the successor UNTAET mission that functioned under the authority of the United Nations. Even after independence in 2002, Australian forces continued to play a modest role in the greatly reduced security presence.

The Australian government took a particular interest in the question of security sector reform. This interest was a product of the fact that a protracted guerrilla struggle was an important element in the eventual failure of Indonesian rule, and also because even in 2000 it was clear that the political elite were determined to maintain military forces drawn from former resistance fighters despite the doubtful utility to the new state of such forces. With assistance from New Zealand and the Republic of Korea, Australia contributed to the recruitment and training of the republic's military, building new barracks and facilities at Metinaro and providing some advanced officer training in Australia as part of a A\$26 million aid program initiated in 2000. The re-training and restructuring of the Timor-Leste police force was also in part funded by an Australian aid program.

Between April and June 2006 the system of government in Timor-Leste constructed at great cost under United Nations auspices effectively disintegrated.<sup>11</sup> Discontent and then mutiny destroyed the

---

<sup>9</sup> Monica Wehner & Donald Denoon (eds.), *Without a Gun. Australians' Experiences Monitoring Peace in Bougainville 1997-2001* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> James Cotton, *East Timor, Australia and regional order: intervention and its aftermath in Southeast Asia* (London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> International Crisis Group, *Resolving Timor Leste's Crisis*, Asia Report No 120 (10 October 2006).



internal cohesion of the armed forces. Divisions within the political elite and perceived regional differences were at the root of this problem. When the bulk of the second recruitment of the F-FDTL left their barracks on 17 February 2006, their chief complaint was that, as 'Westerners' they had been denied promotion and preferment because the military command was dominated by 'Easterners', chosen as a consequence of their membership of the original resistance. Meanwhile some members of the government had resorted to the use of police personnel and weapons for their own factional ends. When 9 unarmed members of the PNTL were killed by military personnel on 25 May 2006, it became apparent that state control of the institutions of coercion had broken down.

With existing UN forces incapable of dealing with the ensuing disorder, an Australian peacekeeping force (subsequently augmented by Malaysian and New Zealand personnel, by international UN Civpol and also by Portuguese para-military police) was inserted; it was committed on the express condition that Prime Minister Alkatiri stand aside. José Ramos Horta was then sworn in as prime minister on 10 July. The violence of the preceding months had demonstrated that there was a major and seemingly unbridgeable fissure within the ranks of the political elite. It also had shown that, with major youth unemployment and the growth of the phenomenon of gang membership especially in the capital, the potential for mass unrest had to be recognized. Subsequently Timor-Leste has experienced parliamentary and presidential elections, and many of the reform and reconstruction programs begun at independence are back on track. Security sector reform, however, remains a problem with which the Australian government and the Australian military are still deeply engaged. From 1999 to date, Australia has expended close to A\$4 billion in Timor-Leste, the largest amount to support the INTERFET operation.

Very poorly prepared for independence, until the mid-1990s the *Solomon Islands* enjoyed very modest growth on the basis of timber exports, fishing, and the production of palm oil and copra; there was also a small mining sector. This pattern was upset by the consequences of population movements. With greater economic opportunities on the island of Guadalcanal (where the capital had been situated since the Pacific War) there was considerable in-migration from the island of Malaita, which resulted in significant disputes over rural land ownership with the inhabitants already in occupation. The capital, Honiara, had become a refuge for some members of the Bougainville resistance and, partly in imitation of their near neighbours, a 'Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army' (later called the Isatabu Freedom Movement), was formed to expel Malaitans from the island. As many as 20,000 were forced into the capital; in retaliation the 'Malaitan Eagle Force' (MEF) was organised to resist the GRA and fighting became widespread. As there were many Malaitans in the police force some police also cooperated with this force, undermining the institutions of public order. Industries then shut down, public services collapsed, and exports fell by half.<sup>12</sup>

In 2000, after an appeal from the government to Australia for police assistance was rejected, the police force and the MEF staged a coup, expelling the prime minister at gun point and taking control of the capital. Australia and New Zealand then attempted to mediate a settlement between the

---

<sup>12</sup> Elsina Wainwright, 'Responding to state failure – the case of Australia and Solomon Islands', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 57(2003), no. 3, pp. 485-96.

various factions. Truce talks were held in Townsville and terms were negotiated to restore order under a new government. An International Peace Monitoring Team, funded by Australia and composed largely of Australian military and police personnel, was sent to Honiara to scrutinise the truce arrangements and to organise a program of weapons destruction. Though there was some success in reducing the level of violence and constraining the holding of weapons, intimidation and illegality became rampant. The police and their allies became, in many cases, agents of criminality. The murder of a former police commissioner who had sought to reform the force went unpunished, government revenues collapsed, and what few resources could be mobilised passed under the control of gangs. Funds from Taiwan, secured in exchange for 'diplomatic recognition', further stimulated graft. Although significant aid monies were by this time flowing to the Solomons from Australia – including to the courts and police under a Law and Justice Institutional Strengthening Program – much of this effort was undermined by the prevailing criminality that had developed within the major institutions.

With no end in sight to the disorder and decline, in April 2003 the Solomon Islands prime minister wrote to the Australian government requesting intervention. As a response, in July 2003 the 2250 personnel of the RAMSI (Regional Assistance to the Solomon Islands) group were deployed on a long-term peacebuilding mission. Though led and largely funded by Australia it included a number of individuals from other Pacific states, including Tonga, Vanuatu, PNG, Samoa and New Zealand. Its initial role was to restore security and to impound the many weapons still in circulation; the next step was to restore the police force as a credible and neutral instrument of legitimate government. Finances would then be stabilised, the economy would be revived, and those associated with the many criminal acts of the intervening years brought to book. The emphasis was placed upon the police component of the mission, with the 'Participating Police Force' taking charge of the reform, re-training and capacity building of the local force. After the initial insertion of the force, military members of the mission were confined to a logistics role, and also to provide back-up for the police in the event of a significant occurrence of disorder. Of the initial 2,225 personnel, 325 were police officers and 1,500 military (the latter including a combat detachment of 450).

RAMSI scored some successes in relation to its initial objectives, but addressing the deeper governance issues generated a degree of resistance. Reforming the police involved difficult decisions; within a year around one-quarter of the force had been dismissed and almost 100 former members were charged with corruption or crimes of violence.<sup>13</sup> The murder of an Australian police officer in 2005 in a sniper attack demonstrated that the forces of disorder were still in existence. The 2006 elections were conducted under democratic rules, though their result occasioned major instability. Factional deals produced an unpopular administration which, it was alleged, owed its existence to bribes from Chinese business interests. Riots then occurred and much of the capital's Chinatown area was destroyed by fire. The deployment of additional military forces at company strength from Australia was necessary to restore order. After further factional jostling the post of prime minister passed to a new incumbent. However, Prime Minister Sogavare was a noted critic of

---

<sup>13</sup> David Hegarty, 'Peace Interventions in the South Pacific: Lessons from Bougainville and Solomon Islands', Paper for Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies Conference, Island State Security, 'Oceania at the Crossroads', Hawaii, 2003.

Australia; bilateral relations deteriorated when he chose as his Minister for Police and National Security a parliamentarian who had recently been placed in gaol for his role in the riots. The Australian High Commissioner was declared *persona non grata*, and later in the year the police commissioner appointed by the mission was expelled from the country under immigration regulations; the legality of the entire program was then the subject of a court challenge. After a period of very tense bilateral relations, Sogavare was replaced as prime minister in December 2007, the incoming administration re-committing to the objectives of RAMSI. Currently, Australian aid to the Solomon Islands is running at around A\$250 million annually, including A\$70 million to meet the costs of RAMSI which is likely to be deployed at least for a further five years.

### **Peacebuilding and its limitations**

These regional case studies have shown that peacebuilding is a complex task which requires engagement across all of the institutions of order and governance as well as with the wider society. In undertaking peacebuilding, military forces are required initially to restore public order; their role then becomes to act as the ultimate guarantors for civilian agencies of order, as well as to perform such technical tasks as weapons disposal, the monitoring of cantonment or other peace arrangements or the supervision or retraining of former combatants.

Security sector reform remains a crucial area of peacebuilding in which military forces are inextricably involved. Effective security reform depends ultimately upon the existence of governments that welcome, support, and own such reform. While, for example, the principle of civilian control of security forces is an essential feature of stable government, if the civilian or civilians in question use such forces for extra-legal purposes then reform may be counter-productive. Better equipped and trained military and police, if used improperly, may exacerbate a disorderly situation. This has been the outcome in Timor-Leste; the Royal Solomon Islands Police remain an imperfect instrument of order. In Bougainville the regional police force has contributed to the peace arrangements though it should be noted that after attacks on police patrols in 2006 it became necessary for them to carry arms. Although they have been withdrawn as part of the peace settlement, while Bougainville remains part of PNG the PNG Defence Force can always claim some role as ultimate guarantor of order. It is widely recognised that this Defence Force requires considerable reform, this objective being one aspect of the Enhanced Cooperation Program currently being undertaken with Australian funding. As has been noted, this Program has come under intense legal and political scrutiny in PNG.

The difficulties of security sector reform in these case studies demonstrate that the legitimacy of the governments that must be partners in the peacebuilding effort is a crucial factor. However, post-conflict governments almost invariably include individuals who played some role in the division or conflict which necessitated that effort.

In the Solomon Islands the attempt to root out corruption ensnared senior members of the small political elite. Even a former prime minister was charged with robbery, larceny and intimidation; ironically he had been the political leader who had invited Australian intervention in 2003. In Timor-Leste it was the finding of the United Nations inquiry into the events of 2006 that it was the Minister of the Interior who bore the ultimate responsibility for the misuse of the police and police

weapons.<sup>14</sup> He had been a member of the original FRETILIN party and Minister of Defence in the brief independence government of 1975. Subsequently tried and found guilty of various offences he remains an influential figure. On Bougainville, though the original leader of the independence movement has since died, some of his associates now play important roles. In such places the political elite is invariably small and its members are often associated in complex kin or patronage networks. Punishment of past actions involves difficult judgments since these networks are probably as powerful as the formal institutions; their alienation may undermine the compliance that is necessary for peacebuilding to succeed.<sup>15</sup> An effective interface in peacebuilding exercises between military and civilian actors is therefore essential, with all participants committed to a clear mandate.<sup>16</sup>

Popular support is vital for success. In Timor-Leste the intervention of 2006 was generally welcomed by the population, its popularity reflecting in part the experience of INTERFET. After several weeks however, and with little end in sight to the gang conflicts in the streets of the capital, the Australian forces began to receive a more critical reception. Despite receiving the assent of both the president and the prime minister, some political leaders (notably from within the former ruling party, FRETILIN) began to assert that the intervention was actually a coup. In particular, the attempt by Australian forces to arrest a high profile rebel officer were obstructed both by a degree of public resistance and also by the reluctance of the new government to bring him to account (despite the complicity of his supporters in the murder of police officers). This experience demonstrated that even given a positive history, interventions by foreign military forces, if perceived as such, can quickly prove contentious. As vehicles for maintaining public order they are blunt instruments. Police forces are likely to be much more effective, but the Timor-Leste experience has shown that language and cultural skills are crucial for effective police work. Consequently, the Australian peacebuilding effort post-2006 has been largely devoted to the reform and reconstitution of the local police force. Even in this area problems have been encountered, given that the PNTL program has utilised the contributions of police from a number of administrations, each of which has brought their own operational doctrines to bear on their responsibilities.

In the Solomon Islands the government in charge following the 2006 elections clearly used RAMSI for domestic political purposes, alleging that it was leading to improper interference in sovereign matters. Given subsequent events, it is difficult not to interpret this phase as an attempt to obstruct a thorough review of the past roles of some key actors. Unlike in Timor-Leste, there has been a conscious policy of the military component maintaining a very low profile, the local police acting with RAMSI advisers being the main agents of order. The Bougainville case is unusual in that while most of the peacebuilding personnel were members of the military, they were deployed unarmed. Analysts have argued that this policy was crucial in their eventual success, though the relatively

---

<sup>14</sup> Ludovic Hood, 'Security Sector Reform in East Timor, 1999-2004', *International Peacekeeping* 13(2006), no. 1, pp. 60-77.

<sup>15</sup> Shahar Hameiri, 'The Trouble with RAMSI: Reexamining the Roots of Conflict in Solomon Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific* 19(2007), no. 2, pp. 409 – 441.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Goldsmith & S. Dinnen, 'Transnational police building: critical lessons from Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands', *Third World Quarterly* 28(2007),no. 6, pp. 1091-1109.

small size of the theatre and the exhaustion of the population after such a lengthy conflict renders this practice difficult to transfer.

Peacebuilding requires the very widest legitimacy; not only must the process be accepted by a sizeable proportion of the host population, but it must also be validated according to the rules of the international system whether by host government invitation, United Nations sanction, or through regional arrangements.

Timor-Leste peacebuilding has been conducted throughout under United Nations auspices, although post-independence, much Australian governance assistance has been provided under bi-lateral and multi-lateral aid agreements. In Bougainville the initial peace efforts were a regional undertaking also involving New Zealand and other Pacific nations; the parties to the later Lincoln Agreement of 1998 were the PNG government, the independence movement and other groups on the island; more recently elements of the Bougainville program have been brought under the aegis of the bilateral Australia-PNG Enhanced Cooperation Program. While RAMSI was initiated as a result of an invitation by the head of government, it was conceived in the light of the cooperative regional doctrine developed by the Pacific Islands Forum (and codified in the Biketawa Declaration of 2000). It was also endorsed by the UN Security Council.

Finally, the peacebuilding cases reviewed point to the enduring problem of sustainability. In all three cases an intervention conceived within certain limits has taken on additional dimensions. Ultimately the participants must be prepared for a long-term commitment, entailing both continuity in core personnel and also continuous funding.

The first role for the military in peacebuilding exercises is invariably the restoration of order. However, as the case studies considered in this paper have demonstrated, even at this initial stage, in whose name order is restored, which local partnerships are fostered and how the armed forces deal with the local agents of disorder are crucial choices that have powerful implications for the longer term performance of the mission. Geographical location, historical and economic ties, and the relative availability of resources might all be considered circumstances that would facilitate Australian led peacebuilding efforts in the Pacific. Yet the many problems encountered in these cases, all of modest size, would suggest that peacebuilding in much larger, more complex, and deeply divided societies such as Iraq and Afghanistan will be protracted and resource intense. To be completely successful, in the Pacific region comprehensive peacebuilding must deal ultimately with the deep systemic causes of state failure.