Articles

Fault in the mandate and flaws in state-building logic: The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands

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Abstract

The mandate, or terms of reference, applicable to a state-building mission should clearly articulate the activities and actions of the intervention in order to maintain progress and to provide a clear outline for those undertaking the programmes. Often this is not the case, due in part to the blurry boundaries that surround definitions of state and nation-building, and secondly to the growing necessity of limiting activities to priorities that meet the interests of the donors, which are inherently political in nature, require tangible and assessable measurements to determine success. This paper will demonstrate that it is often the least visible elements of a state-building mission that matter the most when truly localising and contextualising the activities of state-building.

This article has been peer reviewed

Since its deployment in July 2003 the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) has oscillated between extremes of praise and criticism. In its first year RAMSI attracted acclaim as it quickly quelled the violence, although by 2006 and 2007 there was criticism over tensions with the Solomon Islands Government under the Prime Ministership of Manasseh Sogavare. In the most recent changes in 2013 there was an overhaul of RAMSI's mandate, announcing a transition to a policing-only

mission pending RAMSI's proposed withdrawal in 2017. RAMSI's initial successes in the police-led stability mission were labelled a potential model for future interventions, however as Fullilove's article came out just before the 2006 riots in Honiara it seems this period was far from well understood by at least one commentator.[1]

With police in the frontline and the military force keeping a low profile, the RAMSI presence was bolstered by a large development assistance program. RAMSI drew international attention for its effectiveness in establishing authority and peace, however in the longer term, a shift in the boundaries of the intervention led to RAMSI altering from a purely security-based mission, to one with an agenda of capacity building and development. The mission has attracted criticism both for the methodology of its capacity-building strategy, and its approach to leaving issues that it has considered too 'culturally sensitive' to the Solomon Islanders to sort out, although this criticism may in fact say less about the scope of the mission than about the construction and expectations of aid delivery through state-building activities. RAMSI's experience illuminates the reality that rebuilding objectives are often ill-defined and vague concerning the strategies and programmes that will pave the road forward towards achievable and lasting state development. This raises the question of whether state-building provides measureable assistance to the populations of affected states. Conversely, do the boundaries set by inherited state roles and responsibilities reflect more about the expectations of developed states regarding stability and security? The latter question is particularly pertinent in the post 9-11 security

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[1] Michael Fullilove, "The Testament of the Solomons: RAMSI and International State-building", *Lowy Institute*, 6 March 2006, http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/testament-solomons-ramsi-and-international-state-building, last date of access 18 June 2014.

situation, as stabilisation missions such as RAMSI are expected to achieve much more than merely to restore law and order—there are a raft of new responsibilities relating to development and sustainability of the state that are based on western definitions of what makes a state a 'success'.

One problem RAMSI faced in the implementation of its mandate in Solomon Islands was the impact of prioritising security before humanitarian issues. This led to a sentiment among local people that RAMSI should be doing more, and that it failed to adequately 'give-back' to the wider community in a substantive manner. This article will argue that RAMSI, while flawed, does contain some important lessons for future stability missions, including the necessity of localising a mandate and implementing adequate adaptation or adjustment of the mandate given existing socio-cultural circumstances so as to tailor it to international 'best practice' in state-building. This will be shown by considering the characterisation and construction of RAMSI's mandate centrally by explaining the difficulties of drawing a line in the sand to determine the boundaries of state-building activities. This argument will centre on the linkage between Australia's interests in stabilising the region, to create a security-focused intervention, and the related necessity of including 'tangible' and assessable programmes to demonstrate success. Through arguing RAMSI's mandate was constructed based on a western contextualisation of conflict, and a rigid separation of 'private' and 'public', it will become clear that socio-cultural issues were considered both too difficult to manage, in terms of demonstrable success, and outside of the Australian-interest orientated remit of a state-building activity geared heavily towards a western approach to developing stability in processes of governance.

Background to the RAMSI deployment

The RAMSI deployment in July 2003 signalled a dramatic shift in Australian foreign policy. RAMSI was established under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum's Biketawa Declaration of 2000. RAMSI combined a military presence operating alongside, rather than in front of, a strong police-led authority structure for reinstituting peace. RAMSI entered Solomon Islands with 2200 combined police and military force, 1700 of which were Australian, with 17 personnel designated for the Economic Governance pillar arriving in August 2003.[2] Additionally, when viewed on a comparative basis, RAMSI's use of in-line personnel sits in diametric opposition to traditional development models wherein advisors oversee completion of tasks, rather than overtake the stated job description of the local colleague. RAMSI's formation represented a 'backflip' in Australia's hands-off approach to the problems of our closest neighbours in the Pacific region. Further its existence is a vivid example of the demonstrated importance placed on strong governance to secure and stabilise the region in the post 9-11 political period.

The rationale behind this shift involves, amongst other factors, the strategic importance of the military relationship between the United States and Australia. As part of ensuring the continued health of the US alliance, Australia insisted it would assist to the best of its ability in the War on Terror. Part of this involved Australia demonstrating it could look after 'our patch', the South Pacific. In an interview in November 2013 former Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer stated 'there is no one else to

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[2] Heather Baser "Provision of Technical Assistance Personnel in the Solomon Islands: What can we learn from the RAMSI experience?", AusAID, Promising Approaches to technical assistance, Discussion Paper no.76, September 2007, p. 18.

do it, these days the Americans aren't going to get involved in the South-Pacific, New Zealand isn't able to do it on their own…. Do it ourselves or leave the place a smoking ruins'.[3] Further, there was a concern that if Solomon Islands had been left alone, there would have been the possibility of a 'contagion effect' and wider state collapse through an expansion of conflict into an only recently peaceful Bougainville, and more importantly, into Papua New Guinea.[4]

The RAMSI intervention did not occur during the worst of the violence in Solomon Islands—that was in 1999/2000 and was 'settled' by the October 2000 Peace Agreement signed in Townsville. RAMSI was entering after the height of the conflict, which was a curious position for an intervention mandated specifically at security and law and order. This is not to deny that there was violence occurring, and the situation was of concern, but the answer as to why this intervention entered at this point has been heavily debated. In early 2003 Australia had refused the same requests to intervene and Australian Prime Minister John Howard only said yes to Solomon Islands Prime Minister Sir Allen Kemakeza's plea for assistance in April 2003. Australia's involvement in the Iraq conflict was limited, but deeply unpopular, so it is possible that the RAMSI mission provided a face-lift in public relations for Australian Foreign Policy. It is significant to note that both operations in Iraq and Solomon Islands were led by influential states, in a sort of 'Coalition of the Willing' in each instance, rather than the United Nations. After all, it seemed 'illogical' to argue a mission that aimed to save lives *and* stop terrorism was not inherently right.

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[3] Downer, Alexander, Personal Interview completed 27th November 2013.
[4] Downer, Alexander, Personal Interview completed 27th November 2013.

While the spectre of terrorism was later dismissed even by its proponents, during 2003 there was concern within the Australian government about what Downer described as the 'contagion effect'[5], and it was felt there was a possibility that gains achieved in the long running conflict in Bougainville, could be endangered. This security focus coloured the construction of the RAMSI mission, and led to a style of intervention which did not force engagement with issues considered as the core causes of tension in the recently leaked Truth and Reconciliation Commission report,[6] particularly access to, and ownership of, land. This avoidance by RAMSI of the root causes of conflict in the construction of the mandate raises wider global issues of significance concerning to what extent security can legitimately be restored without probing the issues that originally ignite conflicts. Consequently, it is reasonable to ask if international state-building 'best practice', which requires attention to issues of development, was overlooked in the RAMSI example, leading to a mandate that was, possibly too vague. If so, this was likely due to the avoidance of the deeper-seated socio-cultural issues, and a disregard for the fact there was only a very rudimentary private sector beyond the unsustainable logging industry.

The development of RAMSI.

The Australian government knew, as early as 2000, according to Retired General Jim Molan, that Australia may need to send in troops to Solomon Islands.[7] Nic Maclellan suggests in addition to the arguments of ethnicity and poor governance, which

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[5] Downer, Alexander, Personal Interview completed 27th November 2013.
[6] Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "Confronting the Truth for a better Solomon Islands", Final Report, February 2012, Honiara, Solomon Islands.
[7] Personal Interview completed with Jim Molan, January 2012.

are typically cited as the drivers to the 'tensions' of Solomon Islands, it is important to note there were also environmental factors such as the 1998 El Nino drought, and the Asian economic crisis that led to a 20% drop in logging revenues. These factors were largely beyond the control of politicians.[8] The purpose of RAMSI, from the beginning was to stabilise the state. Stability in the western ethos of development requires both economic and legal stabilisation, in the form of rule of law and economic growth. This prioritisation of stabilisation of economic and legal aspects of society in rebuilding Solomon Islands targets the drivers of poor governance and law and order. Problematically for the success of state-building programmes the implementation of this agenda is much more complicated.

The assumptions of state-building 'best practice' are three-fold; a state requires enforceable property rights, enforceable contractual rights and a functioning economic system.[9] It is critical to note this definition is highly economistic, a clear problem with basic statebuilding rhetoric and underlying assumptions for the successful state. It also ignores the importance of Weber's monopoly of the legitimate use of violence as a means to maintain law and order, which came to be of central importance in assisting Solomon Islands. So what happens in cases when these assumptions do not exist? What role do state-building programmes have in re-building and creating effective governance if there is no concrete foundations on which to base state institutions? The definitional lines on what role a state-building mission has for the

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[8] Nick Maclellan, "Conflict in the Pacific Islands: the climate dimension", *The Interpreter*, 10th October 2014.
[9] Ted London & Sturt Hart, 'Reinventing strategies for emerging markets: Beyond the transnational model', *Journal of International Business Studies,* 35(5), (2004): 350-370.

development of a fragile state whilst in-situ are at best blurry;[10] as such it is little wonder that guidelines for the activities of state-building mission such as RAMSI are ill-defined and vague. For RAMSI this played out in the lack of preparedness for the transition from Phase 1 (quelling violence and restoring law and order) to Phase 2 (capacity building) and the very late engagement of the programme with issues of the social or cultural sectors of governance, as illustrated in the quiet introduction of gender into the program of assistance in June 2012.

RAMSI had some early successes with the initial stages completed in a speedy timeframe, appeasing both the governments of Australia and Solomon Islands. Two of the main self-proclaimed warlords, Harold Keke and Jimmy 'Rasta' Lusibaea, were captured and prosecuted in Solomon Islands legal system faster than had been envisaged.[11] The shortened timeframe was perhaps due to Australia's mischaracterisation of the nature of scale and root causes of violence. The rapid arrests exposed a flaw in RAMSI's lack of preparation for the transition to the second phase of the mission. Following early success in Phase 1, a large contingent of police was sent home, and this decision proved ill advised when following elections in 2006 there were public demonstrations that turned violent, and which led to many buildings in Honiara's Chinatown being razed. The later Commission of Inquiry pointed out the departure of the Police had left only 13 people trained in riot control in the ranks of the Participating Police Force, and none

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[10] Mark Szuchman, "Imagining the State and Building the Nation: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Argentina", *History Compass*, 4(10), (2006), p1-34.
[11] Former Special Coordinator, Nick Warner, personal interview, completed 10th October 2013.

in the Royal Solomon Islands Police.[12] This riot was a lesson in itself that a large contingent of the police had been sent home too early, fanning a political firestorm that would ensure the immediate focus of RAMSI remained security. There is the argument that 2006 was possibly a tipping point for RAMSI's programs towards something more social in nature, with the People's Surveys beginning in 2006 to gain more of an understanding of the views of citizens.[13] These surveys were designed to gain feedback, however as mentioned in the surveys should be 'always used with care and qualification'[14] as they are not based on a representative sample. The feedback of the results of these surveys back into RAMSI policy is questionable, as significant policy progress on areas outside of institutional strengthening remained slow until much later in RAMSI's tenure.

RAMSI went into Solomon Islands with a strategy centred on law and order, particularly restoring the rule of law. This was completed through improving law and order and quietening violence. Not until as much as eighteen months later did the focus shift to building capability through in-line positions in key institutions, coupled with local training programs for Solomon Islanders to learn from RAMSI personnel. Alexander Downer acknowledged Solomon Islands did not originally seek the capacity building portion of the mission, however the Australian government, after reluctantly agreeing to intervene, believed this

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[12] Solomon Islands Government, *Commission of Inquiry into the April 2006 civil unrest in Honiara*, Department of Prime Minister, September 2007, Government of Solomon Islands, Honiara.

[13] RAMSI, *People's Survey Pilot 2006*, ANU Enterprise p/l and ANU, http://www.ramsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Peoples--2006-Pilot-Complete-report-d6cc0b53-723e-4a14-800a-2c3f23d5cc61-0.pdf, date of access 27th December 2014.

[14] Ibid, p. 6.

was essential to 'fixing' the state.[15] This belief that a core problem of Solomon Islands was the ineffective political system issue was diagnosed during a National Security Assessment Committee meeting in early 2003. The ramifications of this decision continue to be felt in Solomon Islands, where the capacity building phase has from October 2013 fully transitioned to a bilateral aid program, although arguably there is still much to be done to establish an effective self-sustaining governance structure.

RAMSI's mandate —its terms of reference for the mission—were devised mostly within Australia, and generally without input from other PIF states, apart from a general concern from some Melanesian states vis-à-vis the importance of sovereignty for Solomon Islands. The legal mandate of the mission stated RAMSI would enter Solomon Islands, but the Australian government required a legislative provision that demonstrated the consent of Solomon Islands to the mission. This stipulation would later cause concern for the Australian government when Manesseh Sogavare's policies clashed with RAMSI's, hence Sogavare sought to dismiss RAMSI and dismantle the governance-strengthening arm of the mission.

The lack of clarity and strategic direction of mandate drives the direction of state-building and provides the basis on which reactions are formed to the activities of an intervention. The lack of precise guidelines in RAMSI's mandate led to misunderstandings and debate concerning the applicable role for the mission, causing 'rocky patches' in international relations between the largest donor, Australia and the Solomon Islands government. Following the elections and subsequent riots of April 2006, Sogavare was elected

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[15] Alexander Downer, personal interview completed with writer on 27th November 2013.

as the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands. His appointment began a series of diplomatic conflicts between Australia and Solomon Islands, including attempts at extraditing and prosecuting Sogovare's choice of Attorney General, Julian Moti. In stating this, Sogavare also appointed John Roughan to promote a more village-centred form of development using existing land tenure laws that planned to focus more on rural development creating tension with the plans of RAMSI's Machinery of Governance programs centred on Honiara.[16] Sogavare and his ministers led from a position of influence and attempted to reduce the popularity of RAMSI among locals in Solomon Islands, however this was countered with an open letter by Alexander Downer that sought to undermine calls for the dismissal of RAMSI. Downer's letter alerted citizens of Solomon Islands to the potential consequences of dismissing RAMSI. Downer has stated himself this letter was quite a good diplomatic move and a later trip to Solomon Islands cemented the tenure of RAMSI for another six years.[17] Downer argues this letter and visit to Solomon Islands in 2007 smoothed the waters with Solomon Islands. The letter itself could be argued to have infringed too heavily on the sovereignty and role of the Solomon Islands national government through by-passing the National Government and speaking directly to the citizens of Solomon Islands. The anti-RAMSI sentiments harboured by Sogavare, and heightened tensions with Solomon Islands Government during his period in office, were also a cause for concern for the then Special Coordinator, and head of the RAMSI Mission, Tim George (November 2006 – December 2008). George moved to calm relations through, amongst other things, travelling with PM Sogavare on an extended trip throughout distant provinces to

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[16] Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth (eds), *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands*, ANU EPress, Canberra, p. 260.

[17] Alexander Downer, personal interview..

inspect the damage of the tsunami in Western Province in April 2007. During this trip George states he learnt a great deal about Sogavare's position and his concerns, and that this facilitated a more understanding relationship with the PM in the future.[18] The removal of Sogavare during a no-confidence vote in December 2007 and his subsequent replacement with popularly elected Dr Derek Sikua, heralded an end to the tensions and uneasy relations between SIG and RAMSI. The improved relationship continued following the election of Gordon Darcy Lilo to the office of Prime Minister in November 2011. The question remains though whether altering the provisions of the mandate or legal documentation to include regular amendments or, even a tentative end date may have lessened these rocky patches in the relationship between the Special Coordinator, the Australian Government and the Solomon Islands government. Or, alternately whether such a provision may have caused a higher level of political anxieties with a looming finish date for RAMSI. Interestingly in the aftermath of these events the mandate was provided a more precise matrix, in the form of the Partnership Agreement, upon which the direction and assessment of RAMSI's current and future activities could be based.

The application of mandate in Solomon Islands.

The tensions between Australia and Solomon Islands over RAMSI highlights two separate issues: firstly, there is criticism that the largely Australian funded, and staffed, regional intervention was somewhat neo-colonial; secondly, that Australia had enacted a sort of parallel government through the RAMSI Intervention. Criticism of the neo-colonial nature of RAMSI can, to a certain

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[18] Tim George, personal interview conducted with writer on 5th December 2013.

extent, be countered with the argument that the measures and policies of RAMSI remain essential for building stability and sustainability for the country by establishing an effective and self-sustaining political system. However, the sheer scale of RAMSI does draw parallels between it and previous colonial administrations.

RAMSI has undertaken work across three pillars of Solomon Islands government including; law and justice, economic governance and growth and machinery of government. RAMSI had clear priorities on entering Solomon Islands; firstly to bring the state back in line with the rule of law through quelling violence; secondly to install in-line personnel in key positions in government to build capability and trust in government institutions. Amongst the targeted areas of were; the Judicial system, key ministries including Finance, Treasury and Immigration. During the 2011-12 financial year Australia spent $43.5 million on RAMSI,[19] with the overall cost estimated for the mission estimated by the Lowy Institute at $2.6 billion[20] (AUD). All for a small island-state, that quite possibly a large majority of Australians could not find on a map, with a population of 500 000. At no other time in Solomon Islands' short history as a state have so many resources been dedicated to building its state infrastructure. During the colonial period there was a severe under-resourcing of the Protectorate.[21] Despite this increased spending, one of the key criticisms of the

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[19] David Watt, "Australian Defence Force operations: Budget 2011-12 Review", Parliament of Australia, (2012), http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/BudgetReview201112/ADF, date of access 16/12/13.

[20] Jenny Hayward-Jones, "Australia's costly investment in Solomon Islands: The Lessons of RAMSI", *Lowy Institute, Analysis*,(2014) http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/lessons-ramsi, last date of access 18/6/14.

[21] Judith Bennett, 'Forestry, Public Land, and the Colonial Legacy in Solomon Islands', *Contemporary Pacific,* 7(2), Fall 1995, p. 243-275.

colonial intervention in Solomon Islands is the under-funding and lack of state saturation into the provincial areas of Solomon Islands.[22] Though some have commented that RAMSI represents a waste of Australian tax-payer money, there has indeed been some debate as to the mechanisms and methodology used in RAMSI to assist Solomon Islands. One of which is the expensive 'in-line' method used to build the capability of state institutions, with questions of whether such a transfer of knowledge is possible between such different states.[23] The discussion surrounding the methods used for the Machinery of Government arm of RAMSI does not tend to centre on the cost, rather the methods. Squabbles concerning costs, as raised by Hayward-Jones, and whether one approach may cost less than another, miss the entire point of 'assisting' a neighbour in trouble. The issue at hand should not be solely cost-driven (although economic factors will no doubt remain important for the foreseeable future due to budgetary concerns) rather issues of success might better be based on implementing systems that will facilitate a locally driven movement towards development. Determining how to form and complete such a mission remains one of the most important factors in operations such as RAMSI.

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[22] Judith Bennett, 'Roots of the Conflict in Solomon Islands though much is taken, much abides: Legacies of Tradition and Colonialism', *Discussion Paper 2002/5,* State Society and Governance in Melanesia, Australian National University, Canberra.

[23] Francis Fukuyama, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, Cornell University Press, 2004, Ithaca. See also Brown, M. A (2011) 'The nation-building agenda in Timor Leste', in *Security, Development and Nation-Building in Timor- Leste: A Cross-sectional assessment*, eds. Goldsmith, A. and Harris, V., Routledge, New York.

Statebuilding and re-building – where to draw the line?

RAMSI has undertaken work across a wide scope in Solomon Islands, although criticism remains concerning the areas left out of the mission. With an estimated $2.6 billion spent on RAMSI, the question must be asked where do Australia's interests and the role of a state-building mission end? State-building programmes have long been understood to not be 'nation-builders'[24] and have attempted to remain separate from issues of cultural sensitivity which require more in-depth localised knowledge of social structures. However, this mentality seems to divorce the governance of the state from the society that it governs.[25] Rearing the head of a longstanding conundrum for architects of state-building programmes, where is the line drawn and what issues must be left-out? The constructors of RAMSI's mandate drew this line in the sand between issues that involve 'intangible' elements, those that cannot be measured or tracked by econometric indicators, and institutional reforms that are able to be given precise data-driven assessment.

An area of RAMSI that deals both with the demographic spread of the population and institutional reform which has received much less positive recognition is its work completed with the provincial governments. Some 80% of the population lives in the provinces of Solomon Islands, outside of the capital Honiara.[26] Like the national state, the provincial government system of Solomon Islands also has a long history with allegations of

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[24] Francis Fukuyama, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, Cornell University Press, 2004, Ithaca.

[25] See Oxfam Australian and New Zealand, *Bridging the Gap between state and society - new directions for the Solomon Islands*, July 2006, Sydney.

[26] United Nations 'Solomon Islands Country Profile, United Nations Statistics Division', http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Solomon%20Islands, date of access 24/10/2013.

corruption. The Provincial Government Strengthening Program (PGSP) is implemented by the UN Development Program, however it is funded and brought into existence by RAMSI. This program seeks to ensure adequate funding and delivery of basic services and development assistance into the provinces of the state. The PGSP rationale, as provided by the UNDF, states the rationale for this project is 'strengthening governance capacity for improved service delivery at the provincial level.'[27] Through promoting capacity in the provincial authorities the donors are then able to leverage funding 'by incentivising provincial authorities to adopt participatory and transparent expenditure management practices.'[28] The project has not been without issue, and it has been under pressure due both to the fluidity of staff-turnover in the senior echelons of Solomon Islands public service, and because of the clash between public and private responsibilities for both elected officials and bureaucrats. Provincial governments have been poorly managed in the past,[29] and the PGSP aims to overcome this challenge through improving service delivery and financial management of their budgetary requirements. An analysis of relevant documents points out a difference in approach between RAMSI and the UNDP—for instance the UNDP documentation regarding PGSP, places emphasis on improved service delivery, whereas in RAMSI the aim is 'more responsive service delivery

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[27] UNCDF, 'UNCDF in Solomon Islands- Provincial Government Strengthening Program', http://www.uncdf.org/en/Solomon-Islands#topP, date of access 28/10/2013.
[28] Ibid.
[29] David Hegarty, "Governance at the Local Level in Melanesia- Absent the State", *Commentary*, Issue 3: May 2009, *epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index.php/cjlg/article/download/1099/1178, date of access 28/10/13.*

and improved local development in provinces.'[30]Clearly the two definitions are closely linked, however the UNDP's places a more realistic emphasis on simply delivering services, rather than the added complexity of more responsive delivery, understood as a step up, and as advocated by RAMSI. The approach favoured by RAMSI links more closely to the ideals dominant in a 'good governance' agenda, rather than a more concrete basis in the everyday lives of Solomon Islanders in the provinces.

The complexities of cross-donor relations are not new to this program, or indeed Solomon Islands, but the problem does present a clear issue for the future of coordinated development assistance in Solomon Islands during the current phase following the transferral of development assistance to AusAID, and since September 2013 to the Australian High Commission. Additionally, the continuation of discourses the stress 'responsive-ness' and 'improve-ment' signals the extension of a mentality of data-driven economic assessment of the successes of RAMSI and the weaknesses, rather than strengths, of Solomon Islands governance. Highlighting a wider trend towards drawing a line in the sand between institutional reforms and interactions with issues of the social sector, which through closer discussion with civil society may facilitate a more localised approach to developing capacity.

Where to now for RAMSI?

RAMSI is currently in its post-transition phase, with a policing-only mission effective as of June 2013.[31] RAMSI has now

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[30] RAMSI (2013) 'Machinery of Government – Provincial Government', RAMSI, http://www.ramsi.org/our-work/machinery-of-government/provincial-governement.html, accessed 24th October 2013.

[31] Jane Lake, "Solomon Islands: A decade on, transition and the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands", *Engage*, DFAT Blog, July 2013, http://ausaid.govspace.gov.au/2013/07/01/solomon-islands-a-decade-on-

transitioned, not finished, its capacity development role in Solomon Islands government, and has moved away from the RAMSI model of in-line positions towards a more traditional development model of advisors in government ministries. As the argument goes, RAMSI is no longer needed in this area and the work can be supervised by an aid agency as the Solomon Islands state is now within the boundaries of assistance facilitated through traditional aid models. Unquestionably this should not lead to the conclusion the state is out of the metaphorical woods, rather is now at the stage of a 'normal' developing state. RAMSI is now a policing-only mission and will remain in Solomon Islands for the next four years. The newest Special Coordinator Justine Braithwaite expanded upon the current priorities of RAMSI recently by stating 'what we are trying to do through the drawdown strategy and our capacity development plan is put in place workable solutions for the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force that they will be able to maintain and manage after RAMSI leaves.'[32]Further, there will also be an increased focus upon the entrenched family and gender-based violence (GBV) against women. It would seem RAMSI has left engagement with issues of the social sector of governance until last. This issue has a considerable history in the country. Along with logging and land tenure, GBV was an issue which, until the past 18 months, RAMSI had regarded as being too culturally sensitive. In this instance it sees quite possible there are two separate definitions of security used to assess the successes of RAMSI. The mandate of RAMSI is based on state security, with the core concern being the safety of the region and the continued

transition-and-the-regional-assistance-mission-to-solomon-islands-ramsi/, date of access 16/7/2014.

[32] Radio Australia, "New RAMSI special coordinator outlines priorities for Solomons", 25th November 2013, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-15/new-ramsi-special-coordinator-begins-role/5095674, date of access 2nd December 2013.

viability of the Solomon Islands state. Warding against the disintegration of state boundaries and significantly, avoiding potential 'petri-dishes' for terrorism that Wainwright warned of in the ASPI report of 2003.[33] There is another definition of security, human security, which concerns itself less crucially with the state and more with the humans living within the state.[34]As Axworthy states 'human security today puts people first and recognizes that their safety is integral to the promotion and maintenance of international peace and security. The security of states is essential, but not sufficient.'[35]Utilising this definition of security the concerns of GBV and the social sector are of vital importance to developing the security of the citizens, and state, of Solomon Islands.

The issues of land and logging are areas wherein RAMSI has stated it would not interfere with current provisions beyond the assisting with administrative-based assistance. However, the close relationship that exists between GBV and law and order issues, which have been firmly inside the boundaries of RAMSI's mandate, makes the problem of violence against women much more difficult to ignore. The rationale behind culturally sensitive issues being either left until last or avoided by RAMSI lies, critically, in the formation and construction of its mandate. The mandate of RAMSI sought to assist in areas understood to have contributed to degeneration of state security and governance, linking back to the wider Australian imperative of maintaining regional security.

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[33] Elsina Wainwright, *Our Failing Neighbour Australia and the future of Solomon Islands*, ASPI, 2003, Sydney.
[34] See Lloyd Axworthy, "Human Security and Global Governance: Putting People First", Global Insights, *Global Governance*, 7(2001), p. 19-23.
[35] Ibid, p. 19.

The approach adopted by creators of RAMSI privileged a foreign security-driven perspective, avoiding issues more closely linked to broader ideals of human rights that tend to be reflected by traditional aid programs. RAMSI's construction drew on a security framework, seeking to isolate the state as weakened, and therefore in need of governance and law and order reform. This initial diagnosis or characterisation led to a program that looked quite deeply into the surface areas of concern, but shied away from looking at deeper issues that were potentially more related to the historical and cultural development of the state during the stages of colonisation and de-colonisation.[36] By firmly establishing a framework that prioritised the machinery of the state—specifically areas of government bureaucracy—rather than a more targeted response to community issues, RAMSI has prioritised the development of a more urbanised state with more resources centralised in Honiara. This concentration is problematic as many Solomon Islanders continue to live outside of Honiara and provincial capitals, potentially feeding into long-standing resentments of inequitable resource distribution.[37]

The purpose of RAMSI was to provide stability for the region and state-wide governance reform. The assumption in this context is thoroughly western, and the framework is based on the good governance agenda and western ideals of state development, which themselves evolved only slowly in the West

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[36] Sinclair Dinnen, "Winners and Losers: Politics and Disorder in the Solomon Islands 2000-2002", *Journal of Pacific History*, 3(37), 2002, p. 285-298.
[37] Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, 'Rumble in the Jungle: land, culture and (un)sustainable logging in Solomon Islands', in *Culture and Sustainable Development in the Pacific*, edited by Antony Hopper, (2000), p. 88-97, National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University, Canberra.

and with many hurdles. In the western or developed state context, state development assumes a certain prioritisation of society and a clear relationship between public life and private life, which itself draws on a division and segregation of the two opposing roles. Without this separation, there is no transparency or accountability for the ideals of good, responsible or effective governance to be built. RAMSI's approach is built upon the 'good governance' agenda centralising transparency, accountability and natural justice. Hence, there is a base contradiction in mandate.

In Solomon Islands, and to a certain extent the wider Pacific region, this separation of public and private is much less certain, and so the social boundaries which inform decision-making remain closely linked to *kastom*. This term that can, in rather simplistic terms, be explained as a historical system of community ties that bond and simultaneously separate the people of the state from one another.[38] The characterisation of RAMSI as a program seeking to build capacity and ensure long-term stability relies upon achievements in its mandate, and is required to ensure a consistent direction for the intervention. The strategy provided by RAMSI's mandate demonstrates a minimalist approach to inclusion of the complex web of social interactions that exists inside the state. The division of the political from the social, which seems to have been the intent, promotes a detached western approach to aid and development assistance. Although many of the programs have been implemented with greater consultation and in-line personnel are

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[38] See Narokobi, Bernard, Narokobi, *The Melanesian Way*, Port Moresby PNG, Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies, (1980), Roger Keesing, "Tuesday's Chiefs Revisited", in *Chiefs Today: Traditional Pacific Leadership and the Postcolonial State*, edited by White, G. & Lindstrom, L., (1997), Stanford University Press, Stanford.

briefed regarding the causes of the conflict and cultural history of the state, the key issue for Solomon Islands' long term stability lies in the relationship between the modes of development and traditional structures of authority and kinship.

The interwoven nature of kastom and wantokism[39] sit in opposition to the liberal development model that prioritises the clear separation of culture and state. Kastom should not be viewed as something that will be outgrown, rather as a way of viewing the world which is rooted in the practices and institutions of government. RAMSI's programs can consequently never be extracted from the social aspects of the society of Solomon Islands, nor value-free or neutral as is emphasised in western states as the goal for state success. In the lived social reality of Solomon Islands society this clear division is much more complex, with a social reality that includes many extended family obligations. Increasingly as rapid urbanisation continues with the movement of the younger generation into Honiara and provincial centres, away from village subsistence lifestyles, many of the previous wantok relationships are forming new boundaries, extending from one of village life to a security net in the urban setting. This evolution does not necessarily dissolve wantok relationships, rather it creates new relationships and obligations for those in higher positions of power to provide for their kin-group members.

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[39] Defined by Gordon Nanau (2011) as "a setting demanding a network of cooperation, caring, and reciprocal support, and a shared attachment to *kastom* and locality. It consists of a web of relationships, norms and codes of behaviour which we will refer to as *kastom*." For more information see Nanau G. L. (2011) 'The Wantok system as a socio-economic political network in Melanesia', *Omnes: The Journal of Multicultural Society*, 2(1)p. 31-55, Paolo de Renzio, "Women and Wantoks: Social Capital and Group behaviour in Papua New Guinea", *Group Behaviour and Development*, (1999), The United Nations University, Helsinki.

This expectation is problematic in a number of ways for Honiara residents. Firstly, for those that are already living in settlements around Honiara the expectation of assistance adds to the number of people living in poorly serviced settlements beyond Honiara's boundaries. Rapid urbanisation is a problem in many developing states in terms of the provision of basic services; for RAMSI this problem was not prioritized, possibly as it was considered not to have significantly affected the degeneration into lawlessness. This is a problem, as not only is land central to any understanding of life in Solomon Islands, but also the lack of services available at these settlements adds to the sentiment that resources are not fairly distributed and the stratification of society is extended. Further, without adequate distribution of resources greater emphasis is placed on informal means of gaining resources, these obligations are translated onto Honiara's residents that occupy positions of power, and they have, in the past, led to inappropriate uses of power and systemic corruption in government bureaucracy. The programs implemented by RAMSI have built up the power and competency of government staff and have provided law and order for the state. Overall they have improved the effective governance of the state. The assumption of the binary of the public and private roles of people is however flawed as the social boundaries and wantok system that forms the cultural and historical fabric of Solomon Islands society is inherently dissimilar to the western or Australian model. Such a transition took over a thousand years to develop in the West. Is it fair to require this large step in a single generation? Or further, to assume Solomon Islanders wish to relinquish their communal values and adopt a western individualist model? The answer must unequivocally be no. The result of this public-private separation is understood as corruption, and the social ties that tend to accentuate it in Solomon

Islands have not been removed with the institutional rebuilding facilitated by RAMSI.

Conclusions

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands is premised upon the need to ensure security and stability for Australia's 'Near Abroad', and it represents an intervention that led to a backflip in Australia's foreign policy position. The first year of the intervention was hailed as a potential lesson for future stability missions, however only three years later in 2006, Solomon Islands experienced a large riot, allegedly linked to the continuing presence of corruption in government institutions and continuing problems regarding the role of government officials. This riot was a lesson for RAMSI planners that transition out of the state would need to be gradual. The riots fanned a political firestorm, signalling there were many issues that remained unresolved. The fact the 2006 riot occurred after the heavy initial focus on law and order would ensure the focus of RAMSI, for the time being, remained on stabilisation and security, with social issues of significance such as land ownership and GBV minimised. RAMSI's attempt to transition out of Solomon Islands has meant a return to a more traditional bilateral aid relationship with Australia, handing back authority for in-line government positions to local counterparts, which have been 'trained' regarding the appropriate nature of their roles. The mission is now a police-only mission, with the added priorities of women's issues such as GBV, both matters linked to capacity development of the RSIPF.

The RAMSI mission (and arguably the western model of aid delivery) facilitates an approach that centralises governance. It imitates, or at least closely follows, the structure of developed states. The application of such a model in Solomon Islands is

based on flawed assumptions as the state is only one source of authority, not *the* source. Kastom continues to play a strong role in people's lives through the predominance of reciprocal obligations in the wider-community setting. The construction and characterisation of RAMSI's mandate fits with the best practice model of good governance through prioritising transparency and accountability through institutional rebuilding, promoting natural justice in the judiciary and beginning a generational shift in dealing with the problem of corruption. Yet it has not engaged with many of the issues considered too sensitive, or beyond the remit of a state-building intervention that are actually integral to the long-term feasibility and self-sustainability of the systems being implemented. Through avoiding so-called 'social issues' or culturally sensitive issues, the mandate fails to engage with the daily practicalities of Solomon Islands citizens, broadening the existing gap between the activities and actions of the centralised state and the lives of its people.

As for the lessons from RAMSI for future interventions, the most potent one should be to begin with a clear precise mandate, which recognises the interactivity of developing states and the difficulty of transitioning between subsistence lifestyles and the urban cash-based economy. By focussing too heavily on the necessity for transparent institutions and economic growth there can be a tendency to avoid basic human rights which affect the daily lives of the state's citizens.

About the Author

Kylie Evans is currently in the final stages of her PhD at the University of Wollongong which considers the mandate of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands. Key themes which are developed in her work include: state building, post-conflict peace-building, the intersection of social and cultural issues in state-based interventions. She is also the co-ordinator of the CAPSTRANS Lunchtime Seminars at University of Wollongong and teaches Development Studies at UNSW.