Chapter 1

Dilemmas of intervention and the building of state and nation

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Even by the momentous standards of recent times, 2006 was an eventful year in Solomon Islands. The first general elections since the deployment of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) were held at the beginning of the year. In view of RAMSI's early achievements in restoring security and stabilising the economy, voters had high expectations of continuing progress. The elections led, in turn, to the first change of government since 2001. Despite its unpopularity, the outgoing government of Sir Allan Kemakeza (2001–06) was the first since independence to survive a full term in office. July 2006 also marked RAMSI's third anniversary.

The events most widely reported were not, however, the passing of these milestones but the public disturbances in Honiara after the announcement of Snyder Rini as prime minister-elect and the subsequent deterioration in relations between Solomon Islands and Australia under the new Sogavare government. Two days of rioting and opportunistic looting on 18 and 19 April 2006 reduced much of Honiara's Chinatown district to ashes, and overseas military and police reinforcements were needed to restore order in the national capital. For most observers, the unrest came as a complete surprise, not least because of the success of the regional mission in the previous three years. What lay behind the April disturbances and the souring in bilateral relations, and what did they signify in terms of Solomon Islands' post-conflict recovery?

After the disturbances, Rini quickly lost support among members of the new parliament and resigned after failing to secure the votes needed to survive a vote of no-confidence. In his place, Manasseh Sogavare became

the new prime minister. In contrast with the compliant role adopted by Sir Allan Kemakeza in his dealings with RAMSI and the Australian government, Sogavare began to openly challenge various aspects of the mission. Many of his fellow citizens and Australian officials have viewed his more combative stance—undertaken in the name of reasserting Solomon Islands’ sovereignty—as a brazen and cynical attempt to undermine reform efforts and protect corrupt political and business interests. The second half of 2006 witnessed an increasingly intense and acerbic struggle between the governments of Solomon Islands and Australia over the control, shape and future of the regional assistance mission.

This chapter locates recent developments in Solomon Islands in the larger context of state and nation building. At the core of RAMSI is an ambitious state-building exercise. Although some of the recent difficulties in Solomon Islands arise from the particularities of local circumstances and political culture, others are shared with state-building interventions in other parts of the world. This chapter examines the contemporary setting of international state building and the particular challenges presented in many post-colonial settings, as well as examining some of the common difficulties facing international interventions and the processes of institutional transfer entailed. The character of RAMSI and its reception in Solomon Islands is analysed before the discussion returns to the events of April 2006 and the ensuing struggle for the control of the mission.

Contemporary international state-building interventions

Building or rebuilding functioning states capable of providing their citizens with a guaranteed level of physical and economic security has become one of the most pressing policy challenges in international relations today (Chesterman et al. 2005). The frequency and intensity of state-building interventions—usually, though not solely, in post-conflict situations—have increased exponentially since the end of the Cold War. Internal tensions and divisions that were effectively suppressed during that era resurfaced after its demise, as demonstrated in growing levels of, in particular, intra-state conflict and internal instability in different parts of the world (Kaldor 1999). The attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 and the ascendancy of the ‘war on terror’ have given rise to powerful,

though contested, arguments linking issues of security with those of state capabilities. In the process, they have imbued today's external state-building efforts with a sense of urgency and pronounced concern for security.

Whereas the international community once viewed state failure after internal conflict primarily in humanitarian terms, the war on terror embarked on by the United States and its 'coalition of the willing' has recast this phenomenon as a major threat to security. Moreover, this threat is not confined to the unfortunate citizens of the state in question but extends to those in neighbouring states and, indeed, the broader region. Building effective states is now viewed as the necessary antidote to real and potential failure and its contagious effects (Hipppler 2004). Western governments contend that the principal threat to international peace and stability comes not from powerful and aggressive states but from failed and failing ones with limited capabilities.¹ The result, as Francis Fukuyama puts it, is that '[s]uddenly the ability to shore up or create from whole cloth missing state capabilities and institutions has risen to the top of the global agenda' (2004:xi).

The limited capabilities of the small independent Melanesian states of the southwest Pacific, including Solomon Islands, have been apparent for many years, not least to Pacific islanders themselves. They have manifested themselves in the difficulties experienced in fulfilling the most basic tasks of modern statehood, including the maintenance of internal security, the provision of essential services (such as health, education, transport and communication) and prudent economic management. International development assistance from Australia and other donors has been directed at a wide range of capacity-building activities with Pacific island states throughout most of the post-independence period. Despite substantial amounts of aid, donors have been disappointed with the limited impact of traditional approaches to development assistance in strengthening weak recipient institutions and improving living standards. As well as reflecting changes in the international strategic environment, Australia's more robust engagement with its Pacific neighbours in recent years has been driven by the need to realise more tangible outcomes in transforming the capabilities of these states. One feature of this more hands-on approach has been the direct insertion of Australian personnel—including police and seconded public servants—into 'line', as well as advisory, positions with key government agencies and departments in recipient countries. In addition to Solomon

Islands, this approach is evident, albeit on a lesser scale, in Australia's efforts to strengthen Nauru and in the Enhanced Cooperation Program (ECP) in Papua New Guinea under which Australian officials—including, for a short time, Australian police—have been deployed to build the capacity of recipient government agencies.

The influential report on Solomon Islands by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *Our Failing Neighbour*, offers an early articulation of the strategic thinking behind Canberra's changing policy. Published several weeks before RAMSI's deployment in July 2003, the report labelled Solomon Islands a failing state and warned of the dire security and humanitarian consequences if vigorous and prompt remedial action was not taken. It proposed a 'sustained and comprehensive multinational effort' to undertake rehabilitation work with the consent of Solomon Islands. The restoration of law and order would provide the initial focus, followed by a long-term state-building exercise designed to 'build new political structures and security institutions and address underlying social and economic problems' (Australian Strategic Policy Institute 2003:39).

While the prospect of Solomon Islands becoming an incubator for terrorism and transnational crime is, to say the least, remote (Greener-Barcham and Barcham 2006), positioning the troubled archipelago within this larger strategic framework bolstered the initial case for intervention, particularly among a domestic Australian audience with little familiarity or interest in the travails of Pacific island micro-states. Beyond the emotive rhetoric of failed states and terrorist threats, RAMSI has focused on issues of governance and, in particular, strengthening the capacities of key state institutions. The intervention has also provided an important source of learning for further engagements, notably in the larger and more challenging context of Papua New Guinea. Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, revealed another strand informing Canberra's change in policy in his reference to Australia's special responsibilities towards the struggling states in 'our patch' (Sydney Morning Herald 2003b). Not only was Australia expected to provide leadership as the major regional power, there was the risk that others, with China and Taiwan already active in the Pacific, might adopt a more prominent role if Canberra did not.

Although broad agreement exists about the potential consequences of lack of state capabilities, there is less certainty about how to build effective

states in divided societies. As Payne (2006:606) states, ‘The dirty little secret of nation building is that *no one knows how to do it.*’ In the literature generated by recent interventions, the terms ‘state building’ and ‘nation building’ are often used interchangeably. This has confused different, though related, processes of political development. Most interventions in the name of nation building have focused on strengthening state institutions, or, in some cases, are aimed at achieving political goals of regime change or transition to democratic government. They have relatively little to do with nation building in the literal sense of developing a shared sense of identity or community among the population of a given state. Using these terms interchangeably has also obscured the highly contingent relationship between nation and state in historical processes of state formation and consolidation. These processes have complex, diverse and lengthy histories in different parts of the world, dating back, at least, to the emergence of the first European nation-states.

Post-colonial state building

Although it is unwise to generalise given the wide variations across time and space, building the modern nation-state in Europe was different to the more recent experiences in much of the so-called developing world, including the Melanesian states of the southwest Pacific. In the former case, processes of state formation often took place over centuries rather than years, they were not the outcome of well-intentioned international interventions and they frequently entailed extensive conflict as the forces of centralisation confronted and overcame rival sources of power at local and regional levels (Tilly 1992; Cohen et al. 1981). In addition nationalism, constructed around the symbols and ideals of shared community and identity, was a major force in the development of many European states (Guibernau 1996). Nationalism, in this broad sense, often preceded the establishment of states. For example, it contributed to the unification of Italy in 1861 and Germany in 1871, as well as to the subsequent break-up of Austria–Hungary in 1918. The two most widely cited cases of successful international nation building in the twentieth century were the reconstruction of West Germany and Japan by the United States and its allies after World War II (Dobbins et al. 2003). Both countries, however, had long traditions of nationalism and strong state institutions. They were already ethnic and cultural communities, as well as

political states, and intervention was primarily about the re-legitimation of their states on a democratic basis.

While the experience of a select few European powers continues to shape much Western thinking about states, the establishment of states in other parts of the world has followed a very different historical trajectory. Many developing states have their origins in the era of colonial expansion by major European powers during the eighteenth, nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. In the process of annexing large swathes of territory around the world, colonial powers created arbitrary borders and imposed external systems of governance with little, if any, consideration as to their fit with existing polities and other forms of indigenous social organisation. Colonial states were external creations with (initially, at any rate) an inherently non-democratic character.

The building of elaborate state structures and social infrastructure often did not take place until very late in many colonial projects. Before the accelerated institutional modernisation that typically preceded independence, local participation in formal political processes was limited and any hint of emerging nationalism was viewed as a threat to the maintenance of colonial order. Where nationalist movements arose, they were often anti-colonial in character, provoked by opposition to intervention rather than its engineered outcome. Many former colonies were ill prepared for the challenges of independent statehood that arrived in the second half of the twentieth century. In Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, the timing of independence was almost as abrupt and unilateral as the original acts of colonial annexation a century before. Modern state institutions began to be assembled only well after World War II, with, as a result, shallow foundations in the local environments they were grafted on to. This lack of embeddedness was manifested not only in limited capabilities as modern states, it was obvious in the low levels of legitimacy accorded them by many of their new 'citizens'. Many post-colonial states were not only weak in an institutional sense, they were incomplete—what some scholars have termed quasi states (Jackson 1990)—with a limited presence in parts of their territories and incapable of delivering basic services, such as education, to all eligible citizens (Nelson 2006). Colonial borders were retained; formal economies remained skewed towards the interests of metropolitan powers and the infrastructure and human resources required to operate a complex bureaucratic state were often in scarce supply. For example,

in Solomon Islands, there were only about a dozen university graduates at the time of independence in 1978 (Bennett 2002:7).

There was little sense of shared political community, beyond a tiny urban élite, capable of uniting the citizens of the new state of Solomon Islands. For such citizens, living predominantly in rural communities, bonds of kinship, shared language and ties to ancestral land, along with Christianity, were more likely to constitute the basis for individual identities and allegiance than abstract notions of citizenship or membership of the modern state. Localism prevailed over nationalism in virtually every sphere of social, economic and, significantly, political life. In the absence of a sizeable and unifying anti-colonial movement, formal independence in Solomon Islands—as in many parts of Africa, Asia and the Pacific—created what was, in effect, a state without a nation. Nations, like states, have to be made; they do not exist naturally. Nation building in a country such as Solomon Islands is complicated by the sheer scale of its internal diversity (with more than 84 languages spoken) and its fragmented topography as an archipelago of about 1,000 islands. Jourdan (1995) identifies the most likely ‘stepping stones to national consciousness’ as the education system; Pijin, the lingua franca; and the growth and spread of an urban-centred popular culture.

The absence of a sense of shared identity makes it hard to fashion the cohesive national community needed for the development of effective and durable state institutions. According to Borgerhoff (2006:104), the ‘double task’ of state and nation building aspires ‘to unify the national community within the state container, with the objective of political stability’. As in many other post-colonial settings, in Solomon Islands, processes of state and nation building have had to be undertaken simultaneously. Unfortunately, they have often worked against each other in practice, thereby contributing to a growing crisis of state legitimacy and the weakening of state institutions in the post-independence period.

Practical difficulties of international state building

Despite the complex historical reasons behind variations in state capabilities, the latest wave of international state building has been undertaken primarily as a technical and problem-solving exercise. There is scant evidence of learning from the long and diverse history of state making in different

parts of the world. The scale and urgency of today's interventions inevitably divert attention away from the need for a sound analytical understanding of the processes involved and the particular ways in which local and global forces have shaped the capabilities of individual states. Yet, unless we know something of the existing state, we are going to have an extremely tough time trying to improve it. Much of the policy discourse has an ahistorical and formulaic flavour, approaching state building in much the same way one might approach the repair of a faulty object. There is little questioning of what state failure or fragility really means and how it has come about in the country concerned. An unquestioning belief in the universality of state structures and the technology of institutional transfer underlies the confidence among international state builders that even the most troublesome state can be rendered effective. The possibility that such a noble goal might not be possible through external intervention, or that such intervention might end up doing more harm than good, is rarely considered. A booming global industry of technical experts devotes its time and energy to the construction of new states and the repair of faulty ones.

In his critique of international state building, Chandler (2006) argues that it constitutes a form of 'empire in denial', allowing Western powers to surreptitiously create what are, in effect, 'phantom states' that depend on international supervision and lack the capacity for self-government. He notes 'the highly depoliticised nature of the discussions of state-capacity building, where concerns of stability and regulation are discussed in a narrow technical and functionalist framework' (Chandler 2006:5–6). Deep-seated political and developmental problems in post-conflict and otherwise fragile national settings have increasingly been recast as technical and administrative challenges. Institutional solutions are almost always derived from donor countries. The current enterprise of state building is founded on the assumed merits and feasibility of one-way processes of institutional transfer from (strong) donor to (weak) recipient countries. Earlier critiques of modernisation theory and, in particular, its underlying premise as to the inexorable and linear direction of historical progress, have been forgotten. Today's cadre of international state builders appears intent on modernising in its own image.

There are many practical difficulties attaching to these processes of institutional transfer. These include the task of managing processes of transfer, as well as more profound questions relating to the appropriateness

and sustainability of the institutions being transferred. Another is how the interventions that provide the context for these transfers can be reconciled—in theory and practice—with traditional notions of national sovereignty. As is borne out by Australia's recent experience in Solomon Islands, one of the biggest dilemmas is how to manage successfully relations between external administrations and elected domestic governments.

Although increasing resources have been devoted to international state building, the results of these efforts have been patchy at best (Pei and Kasper 2003). Even in cases viewed as successful (as in Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands) subsequent set-backs, such as the disturbances that occurred in both these countries in April 2006, have led to the qualifying of earlier optimism. Despite this record, the international response continues to be demands for more of the same: more interventions, more institutional transfer and building and more foreign personnel. Francis Fukuyama (2004) recently outlined some of the most common difficulties with institutional transfers in current state-building interventions. Most of these are evident in varying degrees in the Solomon Islands case.

A major issue relates to the fit (or lack thereof) between introduced institutions and the local conditions prevailing in recipient countries. Just as human recipients can reject donated organs, recipient countries can reject institutional transplants. Generally speaking, the greater the social and economic disparities between donor and recipient societies, the less likely it is that such transplants will succeed. Important matters here relate to institutional design and the appropriateness of external models to local circumstances. Questions about the apparent lack of fit between indigenous and Western institutions of governance have long been a source of contention in Solomon Islands, as they have in many parts of the Pacific, and are one of the regularly identified root causes underlying the recent crisis (Morgan and McLeod 2006). Whether these are genuine sources of discontent or simply a pretext for mobilising opposition to intervention, it is difficult for international state builders to do other than promote their own institutional solutions, particularly when most have no previous local experience or knowledge and are deployed for relatively short periods. This tendency to be guided by 'home' experience is likely to be accentuated further by the dominance of foreign personnel and sizeable numbers of public servants seconded from overseas government agencies and departments.

A second and related set of difficulties concerns issues of ownership and the mechanisms of transfer. As development practitioners have long been aware, local ownership is critical for successful institutional transfer. How do international actors generate local demand for reform? This issue continues to perplex development specialists who have traditionally been more concerned with supplying solutions than with stimulating local demand for them. There is also the very real dilemma of how donors can engage in state building in fragile environments without simultaneously 'crowding out' or marginalising local actors who ultimately will have to take responsibility for running the state. This is an obvious challenge in situations where there has been, in effect, no functioning government and where large numbers of foreign officials working to often unrealistic time frames and schooled in foreign operating systems feel as though they have to perform many of the functions themselves if the job is to be done. Early in the Solomon Islands intervention, Kabutaulaka (2004) warned that the dominance of RAMSI in decision making could lead to a debilitating dependency or a perception of foreign occupation. In a later paper (Kabutaulaka 2006), he referred to post-conflict Solomon Islands as a 'crowded stage', comprising a bewildering array of international actors with multiple, sometimes conflicting, agendas and with relatively little space left for local players. The capacity-building paradox is that the more substantial the intervention is, the greater is the risk that it ends up sucking out local capacity rather than building it (Ignatieff 2003).

A third set of issues relates to the challenges external interveners face in charting a course through the unfamiliar and troubled local political contexts where these engagements typically occur. Despite the technical and depoliticised self-image of international state building, the intrusive and unsettling character of such interventions reveals them as profoundly political enterprises that deliberately seek to challenge and transform existing power relations. Just as there were winners and losers in the conflict that gave rise to the intervention (Dinnen 2002), there will be those who stand to gain from the intervention and those who stand to lose. In this respect, no intervention can be politically neutral. The much longer history of interaction between Solomon Islanders and successive waves of interveners (entailing alternating patterns of accommodation and resistance) is, in many respects, echoed

in current relations between Solomon Islands' political leadership and the regional assistance mission (and its Australian sponsors).

The focus on restoring law and order is shared by all of today's post-conflict interventions and is manifested in the growing prominence of issues of policing and criminal justice. Rebuilding the security apparatus of weak or failed states through strengthening the rule of law reflects international thinking about the importance of internal security as a prerequisite for all other aspects of state building and development. International systems fail to acknowledge, however, the highly contested character of historical processes of state consolidation and tend to respond to any sign of conflict as a lapse from the normal condition of peace. In asking today's fragile states to consolidate without conflict, they are expecting those states to do something never asked of their European forerunners. Concentrating on suppressing the manifestations of conflict can also mean neglecting their underlying causes. International insistence on rule-of-law solutions in post-conflict settings such as Solomon Islands regularly attracts criticism that the root causes are not being addressed. In addition, the state-centric character of international conceptions of the rule of law can obscure the important role of non-state institutions in the maintenance (and not just the disruption) of order, as well as the resolution of local conflicts, in countries such as Solomon Islands.

The Solomon Islands crisis and the regional intervention

RAMSI was deployed in July 2003 in response to a plea for help from the Solomon Islands government. In the preceding five years, the country had been gripped by a progressively debilitating internal crisis that manifested itself in serious lawlessness in some areas, the breakdown of essential government services, closure of major commercial enterprises and impending national bankruptcy (Fraenkel 2004; Moore 2004). What began as tensions between the indigenous inhabitants of Guadalcanal and settlers from the adjacent island of Malaita, developed into a low-level armed conflict between opposing ethnic militias and, in its later stages, into a process of 'instrumentalisation of disorder' whereby criminality became a key political instrument (Chabal and Daloz 1999). The latter culminated in the effective capture and ransacking of the state by a relatively small cohort of corrupt leaders, ex-militants and renegade police officers.

The police fractured along ethnic lines. Rogue officers, in collaboration with Malaitan militants, raided armouries in Auki and Honiara and mounted a *de facto* coup in June 2000. After the Australian and New Zealand-brokered Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) in October 2000, which helped avert an all-out civil war, the Guadalcanal militants—who had forcibly displaced about 30,000, mainly Malaitan, settlers from rural Guadalcanal—turned in on themselves in a series of violent internecine struggles. The most serious bloodshed occurred in the southern Weather Coast and involved the notorious militia leader Harold Keke. By early 2003, it was clear that the beleaguered and heavily compromised government of Sir Allan Kemakeza was incapable on its own of halting the deteriorating situation.

Having declined previous requests for intervention on the grounds that the crisis was an internal matter to be resolved by Solomon Islands authorities, the Australian government agreed to lead a regional assistance mission. Although leadership and most of the resources were provided by Australia, the intervention was undertaken on a regional rather than bilateral basis, largely to enhance its legitimacy. After agreement among Pacific island foreign ministers, it was mobilised under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum and, specifically, the Biketawa Declaration on Mutual Assistance of 2000. RAMSI marked the beginning of Australia's new robust model of regional engagement. Labelled as 'cooperative intervention' by the Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer (2003), RAMSI has been described as having 'a unique kind of authority in the world of state building—it has substantial practical influence but works with and inside the Solomon Islands Government, which remains the repository of executive, legislative and judicial authority' (Fullilove 2006b:33).

The mission's design drew on previous Australian and international peace-keeping and post-conflict reconstruction experiences—such as in Kosovo and, in particular, East Timor—but added some new features. With a large military contingent as back-up, the intervention was led initially by police. Approximately 330 police made up the Participating Police Force (PPF) and were drawn mainly from the Australian Federal Police (AFP), but included smaller contingents from Australian state forces, New Zealand and other forum member states.² Security was restored quickly and without bloodshed in Honiara and a police presence was extended to other parts of the country. Key militia leaders were arrested

and large numbers of weapons and ammunition were removed from the community. By February 2004, more than 50 police officers (including two deputy commissioners) had been arrested and charged with 285 offences (Dinnen et al. 2006:99). More than 400 officers (approximately 25 per cent of the total police force) were removed from the force (Dinnen et al. 2006). Deployed originally in an executive capacity, the PPF has switched progressively into an advisory and capacity-building role, although it remains active in certain operational areas.

The police-building component was always intended as a gateway to a more ambitious exercise aimed at reconstructing the Solomon Islands State (Peake and Brown 2005). As former RAMSI Special Coordinator James Batley (2005) noted, '[a]t its core, RAMSI is a state-building exercise.' Substantial Australian resources have been committed to rebuilding the police force, strengthening the law and justice sector, implementing a range of governance programs, improving financial management and undertaking economic reform. In addition to police personnel, RAMSI includes seconded Australian public servants and private consultants in key departments and agencies of the Solomon Islands government. Overall coordination is exercised by a Special Coordinator's Office in Honiara, headed by a senior Australian diplomat, and through a high-level inter-departmental committee in Canberra.

The speed and peaceful manner in which RAMSI restored law and order and essential services and stabilised government finances attracted considerable praise (Fullilove 2006a). These impressive achievements provided a welcome contrast with the generally disappointing results from other international interventions. RAMSI was commended as 'a model for future deployments' (Watson 2005:37). The disturbances in April 2006, however, and the subsequent deterioration in relations between Australia and Solomon Islands highlighted the premature character of initial appraisals. Even before the April unrest there had been set-backs. An early example was the fatal shooting of a young Australian Protective Services officer, Adam Dunning, while on patrol in Honiara in December 2004. The security clamp-down that followed led to complaints of heavy-handed policing tactics, and gave rise to the first court action to test the constitutionality of the immunity provisions provided to foreign police personnel under the Facilitation of International Assistance Act. Although this and another constitutional challenge were ultimately unsuccessful, they generated anxiety among senior

RAMSI officials. Australian police serving in Papua New Guinea under the ECP had to be withdrawn after a successful challenge in the Supreme Court in May 2005 (Dinnen et al. 2006:103).

While there have undoubtedly been accomplishments (see O'Callaghan, this volume), the progress of capacity development has been slow and uneven. Despite its prominence in the work of post-conflict reconstruction, capacity development remains an imprecise and long-term undertaking. Almost three years after RAMSI's initial deployment, the Australian Commissioner of the Solomon Islands Police Force (SIPF) acknowledged that his force remained 'inadequately prepared and is still not properly equipped to perform the vast majority of policing functions throughout the Solomon Islands'.³ International police-building experience confirms the uncertainties and slowness of this kind of work (Bayley 2006).

The majority of Solomon Islanders have been supportive of the intervention throughout the past four years. Memories of the insecurity and paralysis of government that preceded RAMSI's deployment remain fresh and many fear the consequences of a premature departure. Criticisms have nevertheless been made and many of these are heard in other interventions. Most have called for adaptation of the mission rather than its total withdrawal. While some concerns have been addressed, others are trickier to deal with. Outright opposition has been confined to a relatively small number of people, such as the ex-militants and separatists in North Malaita who have accused the mission of anti-Malaita bias (see Allen, this volume). Although these views are not shared widely, indigenous sovereignty movements with a strong antipathy towards foreign interference (real or perceived) have long histories in parts of the country (see Timmer, this volume).

The sheer scale of RAMSI in such a small country has predictably given rise to concerns about the dominance of foreign personnel in key government agencies and the risk that Solomon Islands officials could become marginalised. This was the gist of the plea by the Solomon Islands Christian Association (SICA) that RAMSI should respect the need for indigenous leadership and resist the temptation to provide all the answers.⁴ Enhancing Solomon Islander participation, particularly in the early stages of the mission, proved difficult for many reasons, not least owing to the shortage of suitably qualified local personnel to take up senior positions.

Concerns about Australian dominance reflect the fact that Australia has provided the bulk of personnel and resources for the mission. Other participating countries have not been in a position to make substantial contributions. A shortage of relevant skills in Pacific island countries has been a significant factor. Indeed, relatively few specialised personnel (from any source country) can claim to be experts in Solomon Islands cultures and languages. RAMSI officials have become increasingly aware of these difficulties and have tried to broaden the regional mix of mission personnel within these practical constraints, while trying to develop more appropriate training for Australian personnel. Concerns about the considerable disparities in pay and conditions between foreign and local personnel have been a source of resentment in some quarters, as they are in all international engagements.

The early focus by mission police on the perpetrators of violence during the so-called tensions prompted criticism that RAMSI was less rigorous in its pursuit of more influential figures, the so-called 'big-fish', widely suspected of having manipulated the conflict for their own political and economic advantage.⁵ Despite a series of high-profile arrests and prosecutions during the first two years, including five former cabinet ministers,⁶ this sentiment continued well into 2006 and contributed to the anger after Rini's election as prime minister. Indeed, while anti-RAMSI sentiments were not a significant cause of the April unrest, negative feelings were evident in the deliberate targeting of PPF vehicles, as well as in some of the graffiti left behind in the ruins of Chinatown (Allen 2006 and this volume).

As in other cases where interveners are forced to work closely with unpopular domestic governments, a major challenge has been trying to balance the need for political stability, on the one hand, with the appearance of impartial law enforcement, on the other. This was particularly so during the Kemakeza administration, given that many of its members (including the prime minister himself) were widely believed to have been involved in corruption and tension-related wrongdoing. Had all the allegations been acted on, there would have been few leaders left to run the government. Interveners such as RAMSI run the unavoidable risk of becoming tainted in the public eye through their association with discredited governments and leaders. This was evident in respect of the mission's relationship with Kemakeza and his short-lived successor, Rini.

Owing to its high visibility and coercive role, the policing component of RAMSI has attracted more than its fair share of criticism. For example, in early 2005, Terry Brown, the outspoken Anglican Bishop of Malaita, raised a number of concerns about the mission's policing and security activities (Brown 2005). These included the alleged failure to deal with minor crime in the provinces; the Honiara-centred focus; the high turnover of RAMSI personnel; understaffing of provincial police stations; detachment from local people; lack of communication with crime victims; and the shortage of magistrates and consequent delays in court hearings. He warned that without improving its relations with ordinary Solomon Islanders, RAMSI risked being seen as an occupying army.

Although viewed popularly as a unitary entity, RAMSI is a multi-faceted exercise, comprising many different agencies and actors. It is also a dynamic mission that has undergone various phases, ranging from initial peace-keeping and stabilisation to longer-term capacity development with a broad array of local institutions and stakeholders. Its complexity and evolving character are often difficult to discern, let alone fathom, by those outside its innermost circles. In the absence of a well-understood mandate, it is easy for misunderstandings to arise. The mission is also susceptible to deliberate misrepresentation by opponents. Officials regularly point out that certain issues fall beyond the mission's mandate and can be addressed only by local stakeholders. These include the sensitive matter of reconciliation in conflict-affected areas, which, according to mission officials, is the responsibility of community leaders with the necessary local knowledge and standing. The substantial resources available to the mission, especially when compared with those of the Solomon Islands government, have heightened local expectations about its ability to tackle all manner of outstanding problems. Declarations that certain matters fall within the remit of domestic authorities can be interpreted (or misrepresented) as either a failure to appreciate their significance and/or a deliberate unwillingness to help.

High popular expectations have also contributed to feelings among some critics that RAMSI has failed to go beyond the manifestations of conflict to the deeper sources of stress that have undermined the political and social fabric of Solomon Islands in recent years. These are often referred to cumulatively as the 'root causes' of the conflict and, although they include the ethnic tensions between Guadalcanal and Malaita, they cover a myriad other factors,

including the poor policies of successive governments; corruption; regional disparities in resources and income; the poor fit between indigenous and introduced institutions; land exploitation; unresolved historical grievances; and long-standing dissatisfaction with the centralisation of political power in Honiara and neglect of the island provinces and rural areas where most Solomon Islanders live (Morgan and McLeod 2006:416).

An Eminent Persons' Group from the Pacific Islands Forum (2005) echoed many of these concerns in its findings of a review of the mission in 2005. Acknowledging RAMSI's considerable achievements, the review also made a number of recommendations concerning its future operation. These included the need to adopt a more development-oriented approach with Solomon Islands as an equal partner; increasing Pacific island representation in the mission's policing and civilian components; developing a clearer strategy for utilising local counterparts; addressing the underlying causes of the conflict; making greater efforts in the areas of reconciliation and rehabilitation; using local chiefs in conflict resolution; improving consultation between central and provincial governments, as well as with non-government organisations; and implementing more effective donor coordination (Pacific Islands Forum 2005). RAMSI officials have subsequently tried to address, within existing constraints, most of these recommendations.

The April unrest and subsequent developments

The angry response to the announcement of the prime minister-elect on 18 April 2006 indicated, among other things, the deep-seated frustration felt by many Solomon Islanders with the workings of the formal political process. Popular expectations of a decisive break with discredited politics and leaders were high. Two days of rioting and looting injured about 50 police personnel and unknown numbers of civilians, as well as causing extensive damage to Honiara's commercial centre (Hawes 2006).

Disappointment with the naming of the prime minister-elect provided the immediate setting for the disorderly scenes outside the national parliament, but there were many other factors involved. In Solomon Islands, as in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, members of the new parliament elect a prime minister in what is, in effect, a second election from which the ordinary voter is excluded. Successful candidates do not require a commanding majority or

indeed any support. In the absence of strong party affiliations or significant policy differences, loose blocs of members coalesce around individual leaders rather than ideology. There is usually frenetic manoeuvring by smaller groups seeking to tilt the balance in favour of a particular bloc. The common goal among new members is to secure a place on the government benches and, preferably, a ministerial portfolio. As several elections have demonstrated, the ease with which parliamentarians can change allegiances has meant that prime ministers are particularly vulnerable to outside influences on their colleagues, including overt bribery. Financial and other inducements provided by Asian business interests are believed to have fuelled the formation of new governments in recent years (see Moore, this volume). Given its patently non-transparent and unpredictable character, this process invariably generates intense levels of popular speculation and rumour. The election of Rini—deputy prime minister in the previous government and discredited in the eyes of many—came as a shock to voters and was also taken as evidence of the hidden hand of Asian-backed ‘money politics’, hence the targeting of Chinatown.

The SIPF and its mentors in the PPF were clearly caught off-guard by the scale and intensity of the disturbances. Public order was restored only after military and police reinforcements were flown in from Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. Several former senior SIPF officers contested claims by the Australian commissioner that there had been no prior intelligence indicating trouble, pointing out that the announcement of a new prime minister should routinely merit special policing measures and that Chinatown was especially vulnerable in the case of unrest in the capital.⁷ The speaker criticised mission police for exacerbating the situation by using tear-gas outside parliament (ABC 2006a). Many others viewed the disturbances and lack of police preparedness as evidence of more fundamental shortcomings with the regional mission, including the large communication gap between its personnel and the Solomon Islands population.⁸ While most external commentaries and media reports applied a law-enforcement lens (for example, the role of the police and other actors in fomenting or responding to the disturbances), the broader significance of the unrest and what followed lay in the changing political dynamics in Solomon Islands and their implications for the future of the regional mission.

The April unrest tarnished the aura of inviolability that had grown up around RAMSI’s early achievements (see Allen, this volume). In doing so, it

bolstered the confidence of local critics of the mission, while probably adding to their ranks. The ransacking and destruction of a large part of the national capital seemingly under the helpless gaze of the SIPF and its regional advisers also raised questions about the substantial police-building component of the mission. In addition to spontaneous expressions of anger, there were rumours of deliberate manipulation of the disorder by certain leaders and political interests. These suspicions appeared to be confirmed when two MPs were arrested and charged with inciting the riots. Their detention, however, led to Rini's political opponents accusing mission police of partisanship by depriving them of two critical votes in the proposed vote of no-confidence against Rini (see ABC 2006b). These perceptions, refuted vigorously by the police, were accentuated by the fact that the SIPF commissioner was a seconded member of the AFP. As long-time Solomon Islands observer and current RAMSI employee Mary-Louise O'Callaghan remarked, 'when you've got an Australian Federal policeman as the Police Commissioner of the local police, it's much easier for those accusations to be made.'⁹

The immediate political crisis after Rini's election receded when he failed to secure the numbers needed to survive the vote of no-confidence and resigned. He was replaced by Manasseh Sogavare, who had shifted to the opposition camp on the eve of the vote in return for an agreement to nominate him as prime minister (see Alasia, this volume). Viewed by many Solomon Islanders as the lesser of two evils, Sogavare's assumption of power was a source of disquiet among RAMSI officials and the Australian government. A leaked email written by a senior RAMSI official described the choice between Rini and Sogavare as prime minister as 'depressing'.¹⁰ Sogavare, who had served as prime minister after the 2000 coup, was well known for his critical stance towards the regional mission.¹¹ His initial assumption of office in 2000 had been facilitated through his close association with elements of the Malaitan Eagle Force (MEF) and influential power-brokers, including Charles Dausabea. Despite hailing from Choiseul in Western Province, Sogavare was seen as being closer to the Malaitan side of the tensions, and appeared to share the antipathy towards RAMSI held by many former Malaitan militants (Allen 2006). Conversely, many Guadalcanal people viewed him with suspicion.

Shortly after being sworn in, Sogavare called for a review of the mission, a clear exit strategy and increased participation of Solomon Islanders in critical decision making (see ABC 2006c). His most controversial act, however,

was to announce the appointment of two detained parliamentarians, both members of the prime minister's political faction, as members of his new cabinet. Dausabea was given the sensitive police and national security portfolio, while his fellow accused, Nelson Ne'e, was appointed Minister for Tourism and Culture (The Canberra Times 2006). Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, expressed his government's deep concern, providing the opening salvo in the increasingly acrimonious exchanges between the two leaders in the months to come (ABC 2006d).

Having been deployed at the request of the Solomon Islands government, RAMSI is dependent on the acquiescence and cooperation of whatever government is in power (see Butler, this volume); this leaves it especially vulnerable to shifting local political allegiances (Wainwright 2005:5). Events since April 2006 have demonstrated the extent of this vulnerability. Former Prime Minister Sir Allan Kemakeza had gone out of his way to accommodate the presence and demands of the regional mission and its principal sponsors, appreciating, no doubt, that RAMSI provided his administration with a legitimacy that it patently lacked among ordinary Solomon Islanders. Indeed, the tacit support of RAMSI was a critical factor in the unprecedented longevity of the Kemakeza administration (see Fraenkel, this volume). Sogavare, on the other hand, had signalled well in advance that he would adopt a very different approach. Cloaking himself in the mantle of defender of Solomon Islands sovereignty, he adopted an openly combative approach, advocating greater local control of the mission and the reduction of Australian dominance. Underlying his personal style has been an unusual degree of suspicion about the possibility of external manipulation of Solomon Islands affairs. Speaking on national radio on 8 May, he stated that

Australia seemed to have used the provisions of the current partnership as a licence to infiltrate almost all sections of the public sector. By their high-level engagement in senior posts within the government we have a situation where foreign nationals have direct and unrestricted access to the nerve centre of Solomon Islands public administration, security and leadership. This is an unhealthy situation (reported in the *Green Left Weekly* 2006).

Sogavare's rhetoric might have struck a chord with those who felt threatened or otherwise marginalised by RAMSI's dominant presence in most sectors of government; however, it also caused alarm among many of his fellow citizens

about the practical consequences of a diminished mission or premature withdrawal. For his critics, Sogavare's assertions of sovereignty concealed a less benign personal agenda aimed at undermining RAMSI's efforts to strengthen the rule of law and the accountability of state institutions that had been eroded after years of corrupt and incompetent leadership.

The prime minister's proposal to revise aspects of the mission, including areas of financial management, met with vigorous opposition from Australia, New Zealand and others, who saw it as a way for politicians to regain unfettered control of public funds and, as such, a recipe for institutionalised corruption. Downer argued that the mission was an integrated package that could not be cherry-picked by the Solomon Islands government (see Appendix 1).¹² Relations deteriorated further after Sogavare announced the setting up of a commission of inquiry into the April disturbances (see Appendix 2). The terms of reference included directions to evaluate the police response, investigate the role of MPs and, most controversially, to examine the circumstances surrounding the detention of the two MPs charged with inciting the riots, in order to establish whether this 'was reasonably justified and not politically motivated' (Solomon Islands Government 2006). While the last term was later dropped, it was viewed by many as a crude attempt to undermine the case pending against Sogavare's two political allies and divert attention on to the police response to the riots.¹³ These views appeared to be vindicated when the local media published damning extracts from a leaked cabinet memo. In the document, Sogavare stated that the criminal proceedings against the two MPs were likely to be dropped once the inquiry started (ABC 2006f).

Primo Afeau, the attorney-general, claimed that the inquiry amounted to an 'outrageous case of political interference in the legal process' and instituted legal proceedings challenging the controversial terms of reference. Sogavare responded by accusing Afeau of acting under Australian influence and questioned his suitability for office (Radio New Zealand International 2006a). In the meantime, the prime minister's nominee to chair the inquiry, retired Australian judge Marcus Einfeld, was experiencing legal difficulties of his own after allegedly lying about a speeding offence in Sydney. In an atmosphere of growing paranoia, Sogavare and his closest associates saw the timing of Einfeld's troubles as a deliberate attempt to discredit the former judge and undermine the inquiry.

Bilateral relations hit a new low in early September when the Australian High Commissioner, Patrick Cole, was declared *persona non grata* by the Solomon Islands government for allegedly interfering in local politics. The gist of the allegations was that Cole had been talking with the parliamentary opposition, presumably encouraging it to mount a vote of no-confidence, and had been trying to block funding for the inquiry (Radio New Zealand International 2006b). Downer condemned the diplomat's *de facto* expulsion as outrageous¹⁴ and retaliated by imposing visa restrictions on Solomon Islands politicians seeking entry to Australia (International Herald Tribune 2006). Sogavare responded by accusing Canberra of meddling in Solomon Islands politics. He told reporters that 'the Government and the people of Solomon Islands are concerned about the manner in which the Howard Government has continued to subtly dictate over sovereign issues that are beyond the jurisdiction of Canberra.'

The next, and most bizarre, twist came when it was announced that the prime minister was considering replacing the incumbent attorney-general with a controversial Australian lawyer, Julian Moti (Solomon Star 2006b). Moti had been an associate of Sogavare for many years and was believed to have had a hand in drafting the terms of reference for the inquiry. He had also faced child sex charges in Vanuatu 10 years earlier. According to media reports, Moti was committed to stand trial in Vanuatu's Supreme Court in 1998; however, the Court of Appeal dismissed the case before proceeding to trial on technical grounds. The case was returned to be heard before another magistrate, but was again dismissed amid rumours that Moti had paid off the magistrate (The Australian 2006). After Moti was linked with the attorney-general's position in Solomon Islands, it emerged that he was wanted for questioning by the AFP regarding his earlier activities in Vanuatu and would be arrested when the opportunity arose. The circumstances and timing of the AFP investigation confirmed Sogavare's suspicions that Australian authorities were prepared to use every means possible to block his chosen candidate for attorney-general. Moti was subsequently arrested while in transit in Papua New Guinea at the request of Australian authorities seeking his extradition (ABC 2006g).

After failing to turn up to his scheduled court hearing, Moti was granted refuge at the Solomon Islands High Commission in Port Moresby, sparking further angry exchanges between Honiara and Canberra. Sogavare

denounced Moti's arrest as a serious violation of Solomon Islands' sovereignty, while Australian leaders denied accusations that the arrest was politically motivated (ABC 2006h). The bilateral dispute now drew in PNG authorities and, in particular, Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare, a veteran of many acrimonious exchanges with his southern neighbour.¹⁵ Somare accused Australia of bungling the extradition and causing diplomatic embarrassment to Papua New Guinea (ABC 2006i). Moti was then secretly flown to Solomon Islands in a PNG Defence Force aircraft, where he was arrested (Sydney Morning Herald 2006a). Australian officials expressed outrage at Moti's 'escape' from Papua New Guinea, directed in equal measure at the governments of Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, who had clearly collaborated on this matter.¹⁶ Although Moti was suspended as attorney-general, Sogavare threatened to end Australia's role in the regional mission if the extradition proceeded (ABC 2006j). Commenting on the tenor of these exchanges between the leaders of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Australia, strategic analyst Hugh White lamented the reversion to a 'puerile, immature diplomacy' (Sydney Morning Herald 2006b).

Police investigations into how Moti got back into the country, apparently without a passport, led to the arrest of the minister for immigration. The Solomon Islands government responded by threatening to withhold the salary of the Australian commissioner. Shortly after Sogavare left to attend a Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Fiji, police raided the prime minister's office in relation to the same investigation, prompting angry protests from leaders in Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu (ABC 2006l). Attempts to rally forum support to Sogavare's side in the stand-off with Australia failed and served to highlight differences between the Melanesian and non-Melanesian member states. A five-point plan presented by Sogavare to overhaul RAMSI and reduce Australian involvement was rejected. The forum nevertheless agreed to review the operations of the mission and establish a new consultative mechanism comprising representatives of Solomon Islands and RAMSI, and the leaders of Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Tonga (see Appendix 3).

As 2006 drew to a close, the Sogavare government again upped the stakes by abruptly declaring the Australian SIPF Commissioner, Shane Castles, an 'undesirable immigrant' while he was on leave in Australia. This had the effect of preventing Castles, who had 20 months of his contract still to run, returning to Solomon Islands to resume his duties. Foreign Minister,

Patteson Oti, stated that Castles' continued presence was considered prejudicial to the peace, defence, public safety, public order, public morality, security and good government of Solomon Islands (Solomon Star 2007a). The Australian government and Solomon Islands opposition immediately condemned Castles' sacking. Castles told journalists that he believed his dismissal was related to SIPF corruption investigations and the continuing Moti affair (Post-Courier 2007). Australian Justice Minister, Chris Ellison, complained of the politics that were continually interfering with Australia's policing efforts in the Pacific (The Australian 2007a).

Sogavare took another swipe at the regional mission in his 2006 Christmas message to his fellow citizens. As well as complaining about the lengthy delays facing detainees awaiting trial for tensions-related offences, Sogavare questioned the retributive foundations of RAMSI's approach to those implicated in the earlier conflict.

It is worrying that the strategy so far has been very heavily focused on punishing those who have been forced by the environment created during the crisis to commit crime. This is a backward look to addressing our problems. In fact one is fully justified to ask whether the huge investment in this program, that will only financially benefit foreign companies that run our prisons, will address the deep rooted problems of this country (Solomon Star 2006c).

In mid January, Australia's decision to expel Fiji's military contingent from participation in RAMSI after that country's December coup was criticised by foreign ministers from the Melanesian Spearhead Group, revealing the growing animosity among Melanesian leaders towards Australia's regional activism. Minister Oti lambasted Australia's 'dictatorial leadership' of RAMSI (Solomon Star 2007b). Further acrimony ensued after it was revealed that Sogavare was planning to re-arm members of the SIPF unit assigned to guard him. Outright opposition to any re-arming of the Solomon Islands police was voiced by Australian and RAMSI leaders, as well as by the opposition and civil society groups in Solomon Islands. Sogavare accused Australia of interfering in local politics by persuading Taiwan to drop the firearms training component in a proposed training scheme with the Solomon Islands police force. He also accused RAMSI of retaliating by withdrawing the mission police assigned to protect him.

Sogavare added to Canberra's frustrations by repeatedly delaying attempts by the newly appointed Australian High Commissioner to Solomon Islands (Patrick Cole's replacement) to present his credentials (The Australian 2007b). Unsubstantiated allegations were also made of RAMSI involvement in prostitution and serious traffic accidents. Another twist in the increasingly surreal tussle between the two governments came with the arrest of a long-time Australian resident, apparently on the basis of a conversation overheard in a local hostelry. He was charged with conspiring to assassinate Sogavare, but the charge was subsequently dropped after being widely criticised, including by the director of public prosecutions, as blatant interference in the criminal justice system. Media reports at the time nevertheless included the unattributed claim that a bounty had been paid to Australian sources to assassinate the Solomon Islands prime minister (Mercer 2007)! Shortly thereafter, a visiting American official urged all parties to 'get away from this kind of boxing match' (Solomon Star 2007c).

In a remarkable departure from normal protocol, an exasperated Alexander Downer sought to go around the government and appeal directly to the Solomon Islands people in a letter published in the *Solomon Star* in early February 2007. In it, he listed and berated various attempts by Sogavare to allegedly undermine the regional mission and appealed to Solomon Islanders 'to go out of your way to encourage your leaders to listen to you, their people, and make wise decisions for the future of your country' (Solomon Star 2007d). In a subsequent interview, Downer claimed that the Solomon Islands prime minister wanted 'to get rid of RAMSI and to go back to the situation where the country was basically run by the Malaita Eagle Force and people like that' (ABC 2007a).

Parts of the western Solomons were devastated by a tsunami and a series of tremors in early April, drawing attention away from the bilateral crisis. These events and Australia's prompt humanitarian response contributed to some thawing in relations (New Zealand Herald 2007); however, this turned out to be a temporary reprieve and the 'boxing match' soon resumed. The Defence Force Board of Inquiry in Port Moresby investigating Moti's flight from Papua New Guinea was uncovering mounting evidence of political involvement at the highest levels in the decision to facilitate Moti's escape. An increasingly petulant Somare sought to have the inquiry disbanded. He also sacked his defence minister and named himself as replacement,

thereby ensuring that the report ended up on his desk. Despite Somare's attempts to suppress the publication of the report, *The Australian* newspaper obtained a leaked copy. The report pointed the finger squarely at Somare and recommended that he and several of his civilian and military advisers be investigated for a range of possible offences (The Australian 2007d).

The announcement that a Fijian police officer, Jahir Khan, had been sworn in as the new commissioner of the SIPF in May prompted protests from the Public Service Commission about irregularities in the appointment process (Radio New Zealand International 2007). It was also opposed by local groups who saw it as another attempt by Sogavare to place a compliant person in a critical national post. Khan's appointment was seen as a way of undermining the legal system and the anti-corruption efforts of RAMSI and the police. Groups that had been protesting against the appointment of Moti as attorney-general now added the new commissioner to their list of grievances (ABC 2007b). Unease about this appointment was heightened when Khan announced that he had submitted a supplementary budget to the government seeking US\$2.6 million to re-arm elements of the SIPF (SIBC 2007). Moti was formally sworn in as attorney-general on 10 July 2007, despite strident opposition from the Solomon Islands Public Service Commission, the legal fraternity, parliamentary opposition and civil society groups, as well as the governments of Australia and New Zealand (ABC 2007c). Meanwhile, the commission of inquiry into the April 2006 riots, chaired by former PNG judge Brian Brunton, had finally begun in Honiara. As RAMSI marked its fourth anniversary in July 2007, the commission released an interim report (Solomon Islands Government 2007). Among its preliminary findings were that the riots had been politically motivated and that RAMSI police had fallen short in their preparation for and response to the disturbances.

Conclusions

Despite the mounting difficulties facing RAMSI in the wake of the April 2006 disturbances, it would be premature to predict its impending failure, just as it was to proclaim its success after its early accomplishments. The impact of the intervention will be measured ultimately by what it leaves behind. As well as set-backs, there have been successes that have been largely overshadowed

by the disturbances and deterioration in bilateral relations. These have included changes to the taxation system, which have seen Solomons Island government revenue increasing by 170 per cent in RAMSI's first three years, and other reforms that have contributed to growth in the economy and employment opportunities for Solomon Islanders (The Australian 2007c). While falling well short of levels required by the fast-growing population, they nevertheless represent a significant achievement given the disastrous economic situation that existed in mid 2003. Likewise, as O'Callaghan points out in this volume, beneath the high-level jousting between political leaders in Honiara and Canberra, relations between many RAMSI personnel and their Solomon Islander counterparts are very effective. Moreover, retaining overwhelming popular support four years after deployment is unusual among contemporary state-building intervention and remains the mission's principal strength.

That said, the fundamental challenges of implementing and sustaining its reform agenda remain formidable. RAMSI was always much more than a technical and politically neutral exercise. The protracted struggle over its control should serve to dispel doubts about the inherently political character of international state building. Appeals to sovereignty and nationalist sentiments will continue to provide the rationale for strategies of obstruction and resistance by those who stand to lose most from the mission's far-reaching governance and economic reforms. Alexander Downer's persistent objections show no sign of wearing down the resistance. Recent events also demonstrate just how susceptible the language and conceptual framework of intervening authorities are to appropriation by local actors for their justificatory value and then to redeployment against the interveners. This can be seen in Prime Minister Sogavare's objections to the 'injustices' perpetrated against large numbers of Solomon Islanders awaiting trial in Rove Prison. In a similar vein, others have sought to justify Commodore Bainimarama's illegal assumption of power in Fiji in December 2006 by recasting it as the 'good governance' coup. In each case, one version of justice and good governance competes with another.

The domain of law enforcement illustrates the near impossibility of trying to maintain an impartial image in such a politically charged context. AFP Commissioner, Mick Keelty, acknowledged recently the considerable difficulties of working in 'the morally ambiguous' and 'politically challenging'

environments of ‘imperfectly governed democracies’ (Keelty 2006). Having been criticised earlier for neglecting the big fish, police and other legal agencies have increased their vulnerability to political attacks by switching focus onto corrupt officials and leaders. Sogavare’s successful efforts to insert his personal appointees into the key posts of attorney-general and police commissioner not only threaten the integrity of the legal system, they drag those who insist on strict adherence to the rule of law into messy political struggles. Appeals to the technical imperatives of neutral and depoliticised law enforcement are unlikely to displace perceptions of underlying power plays, whether real or imagined.

Shane Castles’ sacking in December 2006 demonstrates the incompatible nature of a freely elected government and its relationship with an external intervening force. While the intervention makes possible the legitimacy of the government, it cannot ensure or control its behaviour. This goes to the heart of RAMSI’s current difficulties. The reforms it seeks to implement demand robust political responses but the nature of its legal foundations—‘cooperative intervention’—severely constrains the extent to which it can engage politically with a resistant government in Honiara. The imperative of cooperation limits the mission’s ability to push for deeper political reforms while simultaneously making it more susceptible to entanglement in local politics, as illustrated in the Moti affair and many of the other developments discussed in this volume.

The narrow, technical orientation of the mission’s approach to state building and capacity development obscures the social and political dynamics that have contributed to the dysfunctionality of the post-colonial state in Solomon Islands. This is not simply the result of a lack of institutional capacity to be remedied by carefully targeted technical assistance. Rather it reflects the particular history and politics of the post-colonial state and the manner in which it has been shaped by local and global forces. The Solomon Islands state, like all other states, does not stand apart from society as some kind of discrete entity that can be worked on in isolation. Hameiri (2007) has shown how the literature on failed states sets up a dichotomous conceptualisation of state and society by defining institutions primarily in terms of their policy capacity. As a result, ‘social and political relationships are not seen as intrinsic to institutions but only as constraints or obstacles to performance’ (Hameiri 2007:414). The idealised institutions the interveners are seeking to

(re-)build are to be devoid of politics and the pernicious influence of social relations. Despite these noble aspirations, institutions cannot be separated from what Leftwich (2000:9) calls 'the raw processes and practices of politics' that gave rise to them in the first place and that have shaped their evolution ever since. The history of post-colonial states such as Solomon Islands attests to the centrality of politics in their development.

International state builders evaluate their subjects in terms of the extent to which they fall short of the ideals of a modern state. The deficits so identified—for example, the absence of good governance, lack of accountability and transparency, corruption and nepotism, unfavourable investment regimes and inefficient taxation systems—establish the parameters for the remedial work of institution building and capacity development. The imperatives of addressing these 'self-evident deficiencies', often in absurdly short time frames, affords little opportunity to reflect on why these institutions and the individuals that constitute them behave in the particular ways they do. That would require a much deeper understanding of the complex interplay between history, culture, politics and material change that have shaped them. It would entail a search for the rationality in political and institutional behaviour rather than simply dismissing it as inherently irrational or pathological (Chabal and Daloz 1999).

While the Honiara riots involved manipulation by some parties, and while Sogavare has embarked on a personal mission to frustrate important aspects of the regional mission's work, the travails of Solomon Islands in recent decades and the present difficulties faced by RAMSI cannot be reduced simply to the incompetence or mendacity of post-independence governments and a handful of political leaders. While these factors have undoubtedly contributed, they are not in themselves sufficient to explain the profound difficulties of building state and nation in Solomon Islands. Governments and their leaders are significant players within a larger political economy whose roots extend deep into Solomon Islands society and the manner of its engagement with the global economy. The peculiarities of Solomon Islands' electoral politics, process of government formation and volatile system of coalition government cannot be understood in isolation from their encompassing political culture. Nor can they be viewed apart from the mutually transformative character of state–society relations that have configured the political landscape in the past three decades. The

relative absence in Solomon Islands of the institutionalisation and functional differentiation between state and society on which Weberian state building is premised, is a reflection of powerful historical and social forces rather than the product of individual or collective pathology.

The entanglement of pre-colonial and colonial pasts remains deeply implicated in the difficulties of the post-colonial present in Solomon Islands. Rather than nurturing shared community, 'the raw processes and practices of politics' in the post-independence period have accentuated localism and divisions within the archipelago. An important message for the interveners is the need for a much stronger appreciation of the importance of nation building, in its literal sense, and the need for a significant broadening of the narrow, technical state-building perspective. In part a consequence of its mandate, RAMSI's state-building efforts have not been embedded in the larger and critical project of nation making, leaving it with little scope to address the deeper causes of the recent crisis. On this point, it is worth concluding that the disturbances in April 2006—viewed widely as a manifestation of state-building failure—might be interpreted more positively. Is it not conceivable that the spontaneous anger of many ordinary Solomon Islanders at the lack of openness and transparency of their government system was itself an example of nation building in the face of state failure? Likewise, an unintended consequence of the months of bitter and debilitating wrangling between Prime Minister Sogavare and his Australian nemeses might be the translation of growing popular concern into a heightened scrutiny of the actions of their own government and leadership. This illustrates the earlier point that the building of political communities is often a messy and contested process. It also demonstrates how nation building is as likely to occur by default as by design.

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Notes

- 1 In 2002, the United States redefined its National Security Strategy to warn that 'America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones' (United States Government 2002).
- 2 The PPF includes contingents from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.
- 3 Shane Castles quoted in the *Solomon Star* (2006a).
- 4 *Solomon Star* 2005a. See also Roughan 2005.
- 5 See, for example, *Solomon Star* 2005b.
- 6 These included the conviction and imprisonment of a former minister of communication in February 2004 for, among other things, demanding money with menace; the arrest of the former foreign minister in September 2004 on a charge of demanding money with menace; the arrest of the minister for provincial government and constituency development on corruption-related charges in January 2005; the arrest for theft of the minister for police, national security and justice in February 2005; the arrest of two prominent lawyers, including the former MEF spokesperson, in February 2005 in relation to the misappropriation of compensation funds; and the arrest on corruption charges of the former finance minister in April 2005.
- 7 See the articles by Mike Wheatley (2006), former Assistant Commissioner, RSIP, and Frank Short (2006), former Commissioner, RSIP.
- 8 See, for example, Roughan 2006.
- 9 Quote from O'Callaghan 2006.
- 10 This email was a source of embarrassment to RAMSI and the Australian government. It also described extensive behind-the-scenes lobbying against Rini by Patrick Cole, the Australian High Commissioner (see *The Age* 2006a).
- 11 Sogavare was one of the only political leaders to speak against the regional mission during the debates in the Solomon Islands Parliament that preceded its deployment. He warned then that such a mission might lead to 're-colonisation'. See *Sydney Morning Herald* 2003a.
- 12 See also ABC 2006e.
- 13 See *The Age* 2006b. Concerns were also expressed by New Zealand and the European Union.
- 14 See *The Age* 2006b.
- 15 This included the diplomatic stoush between Papua New Guinea and Australia after the so-called 'shoe incident' at Brisbane airport in March 2005. Airport security officials insisted that Sir Michael remove his shoes as part of a routine security check. This incident led to public demonstrations in several PNG towns. Somare has been an open critic of Australia's new interventionism and has taken great offence to the labelling of Papua New Guinea as a weak or failing state.
- 16 Alexander Downer subsequently announced a ban on ministerial visits from Papua New Guinea to Australia (see ABC 2006k). The collaboration between the two governments was later confirmed in the leaked report from the PNG Defence Board of Inquiry.

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