Political Science

<http://pnz.sagepub.com/>

The Impact of RAMSI on the 2006 Elections in the Solomon Islands

Jon Fraenkel

Political Science 2006 58: 63

DOI: 10.1177/003231870605800205

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://pnz.sagepub.com/content/58/2/63>

Published by:

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations at the Victoria University of Wellington

Additional services and information for *Political Science* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://pnz.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://pnz.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Dec 1, 2006

[What is This?](#)

THE IMPACT OF RAMSI ON THE 2006 ELECTIONS IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

JON FRAENKEL

Abstract: *The Solomon Islands election of April 2006 was the first since the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands arrived in mid-2003. In its aftermath, riots in Honiara resulted in the destruction of much of Chinatown, the worst incident of civil disorder since the commencement of the Australian-led operation in July 2003. This article examines the election outcomes, and the preceding, largely neglected, impact of RAMSI on the shifting balance between the incumbent Kemakeza government and the opposition. It looks at how and why Snyder Rini's government emerged victorious on April 18th 2006, and why it collapsed eight days later. In conclusion, the article revisits debates about the causes of the Honiara riots, contesting some of the more far-fetched conspiracy theories and emphasising instead the depth of Solomon Islander reaction against a deeply flawed premiership selection process.*

Keywords; Solomon Islands, elections, riots, prime ministerial elections

The chains came off the doors of parliament, and Governor General Nathaniel Waena strode out at midday on April 18th 2006 to announce the results of the thirteenth prime ministerial elections since independence. To his right was former premier, Sir Allan Kemakeza, whose government had proved the first since independence to survive a full term in office.¹ On his left was Snyder Rini, Kemakeza's former deputy, who was solemnly declared to be the newly elected Prime Minister. Surrounding them were the former cabinet ministers, fresh from their faction having prevailed over the opposition by 27 votes to 23 in a secret ballot held behind closed doors. The message of a triumph for the former government and of continuity in national politics was not lost on the crowds of spectators outside, who had been kept waiting in anticipation for hours in the baking sun. Before Snyder Rini had completed his acceptance speech, the protest had turned angry. Minutes later, rocks were raining down on the parliament building, and the Australian police protecting it. A protracted siege commenced which was

JON FRAENKEL is a Research Fellow with the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, Research School of Asian and Pacific Studies, Australian National University. Email: jon.fraenkel@anu.edu.au

¹ Solomon Mamaloni had survived a full term as Prime Minister from 1989-1993, but his government did not. In 1990, Mamaloni abandoned his People's Alliance Party, and forged a new coalition with former opposition members. The 1984 United Party government also survived a full term, but its initial Prime Minister, Sir Peter Kenilorea, was forced to resign in 1986.

eventually subdued with tear gas. Rioting spread to Point Cruz, Chinatown and to Kukum, with many Asian shops and businesses and the Pacific Casino complex burnt to the ground. Eight days later, six MPs crossed the floor triggering the collapse of the Rini-led government and a belated victory for the opposition, an event which transformed unrest into jubilation on the streets of Honiara.²

Black Tuesday, as the events of April 18th became known, generated familiar debates about ultimate causes of this most serious urban disturbance since the arrival of the Regional Assistance to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in July 2003. Why, after an election process unanimously declared 'free and fair' by foreign observer groups, was there such a violent reaction to the outcome? Were the riots primarily a popular reaction against the perceived illegitimacy of the prime ministerial election result? Were they instigated by disappointed opposition politicians? Were disturbances driven by anti-Chinese sentiment, or was the targeting of Asian businesses indicative of popular perceptions that the prime ministerial election had been bought by Asian cash? Was the key flashpoint the premature use of teargas or, more generally, the poor tactical response to the initial protest by RAMSI police officers? ABC reports that RAMSI vehicles, later that afternoon, had been ignited by youths carrying petrol-filled plastic squeeze bottles encouraged wild conspiracy theories in the Australian press; 'the protestors can be accused of many things but not spontaneity. Truckloads of rocks and water bottles were delivered outside parliament in the days before the violence began'.³ Suggestions of 'prior planning and coordination', and of 'Taiwanese and Chinese influences behind the recent violence in the Solomons' were made by Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty.⁴ There was an extraordinary reluctance to look, in any depth, into the domestic political causes of the riots.

This article looks at the impact of RAMSI and the broader Australian presence on the outcomes of the April 2006 general election, and the subsequent prime ministerial election. It examines first the voter turnout data, and changes to the voting system prior to the 2006 polls. Second, it looks at the broader political divisions as they stood on the eve of the polls, and how RAMSI's arrival had shifted the balance between government and opposition. Third, the chapter analyses the variation in the number of candidates contesting as compared to previous elections, the performance of women candidates, the turnover of sitting members and the complexion of the various political parties. Finally, it examines shifting alliances in Honiara in the wake of the 2006 polls, how Snyder Rini emerged victorious in the contest for the prime ministerial elections on April 18th, and the role electoral factors played in triggering the subsequent riots.

² Rini in fact resigned, but did so only minutes before the vote on the no confidence motion. One of the MPs who crossed the floor, Peter Shanel, criss-crossed straight back after Rini's resignation.

³ Samantha Maiden 'Leading Questions', *The Australian*, 8th-9th July 2006; 'the fact that elements of the pro-opposition crowd were already armed with petrol spray and fire bombs, and quickly set to incinerating RAMSI vehicles after the initial skirmishes, supports the contention that key members of the opposition group instrumentalised violence for political gain' (Morgan, M. and McLeod, A., 'Have we Failed our Neighbour?', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 60, (3), 2006, pp. 421-2).

⁴ Marie-Louise O'Callaghan, 'Cash Inflow into Solomons Riots', *The Australian*, May 11th 2006; 'Unusual Cash Deposited in Solomon Bank', *PacNews*, 11th May 2006; 'Australia's Top Cop Says Cash Changed Hands in Recent Poll', *ABC Pacific Beat*, 11th May 2006; Rowan Callick, 'Corruption the Catalyst behind Pacific Pattern', *The Australian*, April 25th 2006. Michael McKenna. 'Corruption Claims against New PM Sparked Violence', *The Australian*, April 20th, 2006.

THE CONDUCT OF THE POLLS

The 2006 Solomon Islands general election was the seventh since independence, and the first since RAMSI's arrival in mid-2003. It was potentially a key watershed on the road back to self-government. Parliament had been dissolved on December 20th 2005, leaving Kemakeza's government playing a three and a half month long caretaker role.⁵ The Solomon Islands Electoral Commission (SIEC) was in a weak state. Longstanding Chief Electoral Officer John Babalu had not had his contract renewed in 2005, and his successor, Martin Karani, had been fired for misappropriation of funds. The new supervisor, Musu Kevu, had been appointed only late in 2005. An AusAID-funded Electoral Assistance Project brought seven advisors from the Australian Electoral Commission to assist the SIEC, who also ran an AusAID and NZAID-supported Solomon Islands Village Level Civic Education Project which toured every ward and most of the major villages across the country. Unlike 2001 when donors funded the entire election, other costs of the 2006 election were met by the Solomon Islands government.⁶

The most serious problem was with the electoral rolls. The final tally of 342,119 registered voters entailed an 85 percent increase over the 2001 figure. With an estimated population of 470,681, this implied that 73 percent of citizens were eligible to vote, an unlikely figure given that around half the population was below the legal minimum voting age of 18. One reason was the absence of any 'cleaning' of the electoral register, to remove those deceased or those who had shifted constituency.⁷ Figure 1 shows the distribution of registered voters across the 50 constituencies, as well as the variation in turnout across the country. The largest numbers of registered voters were in the three Honiara constituencies, but here the turnout was only 28.6 percent, well below the national average of 56.4 percent. Many of those living in Honiara were registered twice, once in their place of residence, and again on their island of origin. Mobile town-dwellers regularly vote where they have land rights or strong kinship connections, rather than in the more ethnically inter-mixed urban centres. The Electoral Act contains no provisions for absentee voting. In the days before each general election, outward-bound vessels transport large numbers of islanders across the group, a process which enhances the political leverage of ship-owners who often double as local logging magnates. The absence of any provision for absentee voting also disenfranchises the large numbers of mobile public servants, police officers and others, engaged in the process of electoral administration and therefore unable to return to their homes to vote.

⁵ 'There shall be a general election at such time within four months of every dissolution of Parliament...' (Solomon Constitution 1978, The Solomon Islands Independence Order 1978, S. 74).

⁶ I am indebted to Alistair Legge, of the AEC, who managed the Civic Education Project, for details about these arrangements.

⁷ Commentary by Solomon Islands Electoral Commission, *Solomon Star*, 20th March 2006.

Figure 1:
Registered Voters & Turnout, 2006

The most substantial change that occurred in electoral administration prior to the 2006 polls was the shift from a multiple- to single-ballot box system. In previous elections, polling stations had been organised with separate ballot boxes set aside for each candidate. The voter would collect an endorsed ballot paper from the Presiding Officer and then enter a private room to deposit this in the box of their favoured candidate. The system eased the way for abuse.⁸ The voter could pass through the booth without depositing the ballot paper, and sell this outside the polling station to the highest bidder. Candidates or their agents might then cast their own vote towards the end of the polling day, but in the process deposit sizeable numbers of purchased votes into the ballot boxes. Counting agents reported, at past elections, discovering large wads of stapled ballots with identical marks in the boxes. With the new single ballot box system, this method of vote-buying became impossible, and the reform was widely applauded by Returning and Presiding Officers, polling agents and many candidates, as well as by most ordinary voters. At only around 1.5 percent, the rate of invalid (or informal) voting was lower than many had anticipated.

Unprecedented numbers of international observers arrived in the Solomon Islands prior to the April 2006 election, including delegations from the Pacific Islands Forum, Australia, New Zealand, America and Japan, with the U.N. providing logistical coordination. The Commonwealth also had its own team, and engaged in training domestic observers. Together, domestic observers and a ‘Winds of Change’ Clean Election Campaign initially inspired by Moral Rearmament Group activities in Kenya, entailed a stronger role for civil society activists than at previous elections, and served to focus attention on issues of personal probity, moral character and good governance.⁹ Activists sought to get voters to sign undertakings against corruption: ‘I pledge that I will not accept bribes, accept any false promises, sell my vote or involve [*sic*] in any corrupt activity before, during or after the

⁸ See the comments of SIEC Adviser David Clarke in ‘Election Managers Train to Conduct National Election’, *Solomon Star*, 10th February 2006.

⁹ The Moral Rearmament Group grew out of the 1930s Oxford Group, and is known as ‘Initiatives of Change’ in Australia, see <http://www.au.iofc.org>.

election'.¹⁰ The AusAID-funded Clean Election Campaign, together with 'Winds of Change', generated anxiety among government ministers that this implied support for some cathartic sweeping away of sitting members. This was one of a host of new factors, connected with RAMSI's arrival, which influenced the habitually opaque and adaptable electoral processes of the Solomon Islands.

A SHAPE OF SHAPELESSNESS

Sir Allan Kemakeza's chances of survival as Prime Minister depended on his repeating the coalition-building exercise that had given him the position back in 2001. His skills in this respect owed much to the political experience gained under the later governments of Solomon Mamaloni (1989-1993, 1994-97). Kemakeza had originally entered parliament as the member for Savo/Russells in 1989, and become Minister of Police in Mamaloni's People's Alliance Party (PAP) government. When Mamaloni abandoned the PAP in 1990 after an internal party revolt, and stitched together a new coalition with opposition leaders, Kemakeza was one of the loyal ministers who accompanied him. At the 1993 polls, Kemakeza stood successfully as one of the candidates affiliated to Mamaloni's Government of National Unity and Reconciliation (GNUR) grouping. In 1994, he became Minister for Forestry, Environment and Conservation when Mamaloni returned to office, presiding over the most controversial phase of unsustainable round log export in the country's history.¹¹ The Savo politician returned to cabinet for a third time after the June 2000 coup, as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for National Unity, Reconciliation & Peace. Aboard HMAS Tobruk off the coast near Honiara, he was responsible for the handing out of S\$10 million to provincial politicians, most of which ended up in the hands of leaders of the Malaita Eagle Forces (MEF).¹² In the months following the October 2000 Townsville Peace Agreement, Kemakeza supervised the distribution of compensation money to militant leaders, including handling pay-outs from the S\$133.5 million (US\$25m) loan provided by the Taiwanese EXIM Bank. In the process, he awarded himself S\$851,000 (US\$164,754) purportedly for damage to his property in Western Guadalcanal, and was sacked for embezzlement. Despite these episodes, in June 2001 Kemakeza received the Knights Bachelor award from the British Queen for 'services to policing and politics'.¹³

After the 2001 polls, Sir Allan Kemakeza exploited his newfound status to emerge triumphant in the race to be Prime Minister. Gathering together at the Honiara Hotel, Sir Allan's seamlessly rejuvenated PAP signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Association of Independent Members of Parliament (AIMP). AIMP leader Snyder Rini consequently stepped aside as a candidate for the prime ministerial post, giving Sir Allan victory at the first count with 29 of the 50 votes, an event greeted with dismay by the crowds outside parliament. As Prime Minister, Kemakeza pursued a crisis-suited variant of the well-established Mamaloni strategy of building up networks of patronage and placating discontent by handing out personal favours.

Despite major failings of policy, including a confession of personal complicity in telling MEF leaders to hold onto their weapons in defiance of his own government's amnesty policy, Kemakeza's government survived.¹⁴ The release of successive tranches of the Taiwanese EXIM loan over 2001-2 fuelled a debilitating process of harassment of Finance

¹⁰ *Solomon Star*, 21st March 2006.

¹¹ Bennett, J., *Pacific Forest: A History of Resource Control and Contest in Solomon Islands, c. 1800-1997*, The White Horse Press, Cambridge, pp. 346-7.

¹² Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands*, Victoria University Press and Pandanus Books, 2004, p. 95.

¹³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/uk/2001/birthday_honours_2001/1390944.stm, accessed 14th August 2006.

¹⁴ Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom*, pp. 141-2.

Ministry and Treasury officials, with militants routinely hanging around outside the Prime Minister's Office with guns waiting for money to arrive. By December 2002, the economy had hit rock bottom, with GDP *per capita* around a third lower than 1997 levels. Cabinet itself was under siege by distraught 'special constables', ex-militants enlisted to serve alongside the regular police at the height of the tension. The Prime Minister's adviser, ethnic Malaysian businessman Robert Goh, was shot in the stomach during an assassination attempt. The increasing personal risk to the senior political classes encouraged renewed appeals for foreign intervention, and set the stage for what turned out to be an extraordinary political realignment.

The arrival of RAMSI in July 2003 strengthened the beleaguered Kemakeza government. After being flown out to Canberra to agree terms prior to the mission, Kemakeza steered the required enabling legislation first through Cabinet and then through parliament, and reinvented his administration as the loyal ally of the new mission. Australian Prime Minister John Howard called Kemakeza a 'straight forward good man to deal with'.¹⁵ With an armed protection force assigned to him after RAMSI's arrival, the Solomons Prime Minister met accusations that he was one of the 'big fish' deserving prosecution for corruption and complicity with the militants during the unrest of 1999-2003 with repeated rejoinders that he would allow the law to take its course.¹⁶ Three of his original ministers associated with the MEF were eventually convicted, and only after that, belatedly sacked. Several other ministers were prosecuted for corruption. Regular cabinet reshuffles, judicious distribution of Taiwanese aid and floor-crossing by senior opposition leaders assisted the extraordinary survival of Kemakeza's government. Seeking a fifth term in office at the 2006 polls, Kemakeza embarked on a lacklustre campaign hoping to obtain credit for the arrival of RAMSI, and the restoration of peace, stability and economic recovery.

On the other hand, the opposition entered the 2006 elections in a much-depleted state, leading some commentators to emphasise the absence of any meaningful distinction between the opposition and the 'old guard' in Solomon Islands politics.¹⁷ Yet that lack of coherence of the opposition in 2006 needs to be seen in longer-run context. Solomon Islands politics has never revolved around clear-cut ideological distinctions, for example between left and right. Nor have ethnic, provincial or regional bases provided a workable basis for coalition formation or even for political parties. All governments have been alliances between MPs from different parts of the group, in particular balancing MPs from populous Malaita with those from Guadalcanal and the Western Province. The 1980s polarization of Solomon Islands politics around the struggle between the United Party (UP) and PAP ended with Mamaloni's 1990 abandonment of the PAP, and UP leader Sir Peter Kenilorea's decision to join the reconfigured Mamaloni GNUR cabinet. Party allegiances subsequently became still weaker, and 'Leaders of

¹⁵ PfnNet, 26th August 2003.

¹⁶ 'Bishop challenged to prove allegations', *Solomon Star*, 8th February 2006; 'Militia Tale Symptom of Sleaze', *New Zealand Herald*, 29th July 2003; 'Kemakeza Blasts Accusations— Then Accuses', SIBC, 27th August 2003; 'Sir Allan Risks both Personal and Political Survival', PfnNet 15th September 2003; Alfred Sasako, 'Why Immunity from Prosecution for Top Ex-Militants is so Critical', A Private View, <http://www.lifhaus.com/sasako.htm>, accessed 14th October 2003, Sasako, A., 'A Bit More on my Conversation with Pious and More', A Private View, 6th October 2003, Lifhaus website, <http://www.lifhaus.com/sasako2.htm>, accessed 13th October 2003.

¹⁷ Shahar Hameiri 'What Really Went Wrong in Solomons', *The Age*, 24th April 2006. Similarly, Morgan and McLeod reject the view that the Prime ministerial election contest as 'a contest between the new guard who support political reform and the old guard characterised by money politics' on the grounds that many of the opposition politicians were also 'old' and because 'charges of money politics and maladministration may *evenly* be directed against members of Tausinga's camp' (Morgan and McLeod, 'Have we Failed our Neighbour?', pp. 420-421 my emphasis). For an alternative view, see Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, 'Seeking Answers in the Ashes of Honiara', *Pacific Islands Report*, 20th April 2006.

the Independents' turned from being kingmakers to potential victors in the all-important post-election tussle for the prime ministerial post.

The opposition-led governments that emerged at the 1993 and 1997 elections were fractious groupings, primarily held together by their efforts to prevent Mamaloni from returning to office. In 1993, Leader of the Independents Francis Billy Hilly became Prime Minister with a narrow one-seat majority, and led a short-lived government which took steps to reduce the pace of logging activity, increase local processing and reform the forestry industry. Most of the ministers in the former Mamaloni government had been closely connected with logging businesses, and opposed the new reformist orientation.¹⁸ A 'no confidence' vote in November 1994 brought about the fall of the Billy Hilly government, an event accompanied by what one Mamaloni ally admitted to have been a frenetic process of 'cheque or cash lobbying'.¹⁹ Deposed minister and former trades unionist Joses Tuhanuku alleged that Robert Goh, later to become Kemakeza's adviser, had been the go-between in soliciting floor-crossers for Mamaloni, and claimed to have been offered a \$10,000 bribe to switch sides.²⁰ Under the restored Mamaloni government (1994-97), duty was reduced on forestry products and licensing of local logging forms resumed. Despite the consequent acceleration of timber exports, government expenditure rose and indebtedness increased.²¹

After the elections of 1997, Bartholomew Ulufa'alu became Prime Minister, again at the head of a loose coalition of small parties and independents. The Solomon Islands Action for Change (SIAC) government was committed to reform of government finances, greater regulation of the logging industry and downsizing of the civil service, with backing from the Asian Development Bank, World Bank and International Monetary Fund. For some observers, this implied a government committed to the pro-market ideals of the political right. Yet arraying Solomon Islands politicians on a left-right spectrum has never been a particularly useful way of understanding the country's politics. The most characteristic appeal of the Ulufa'alu government was for reform away from the 'system of cronyism' that was identified with Mamaloni's governments (which can hardly be identified as serving a 'leftist' ideology). Those reforms met resistance from entrenched interests, particularly in the public sector.²² But the Ulufa'alu government proved able to withstand several attempted 'no confidence' bids, in one case because tied votes leave the government in office.²³

When the Isatabu uprising commenced in late 1998, ministers in the Ulufa'alu government rightly or wrongly interpreted those events as a conspiracy hatched by 'Mamaloni men' that was aimed at restoring the old guard to office; 'the tensions were being orchestrated to topple the SIAC Government in order to disrupt an ambitious reform programme'.²⁴ Some 20,000 Malaitans were evicted from their homesteads in rural Guadalcanal by the Isatabu Freedom Movement. In November 1999, Ulufa'alu met Malaitan protestors demanding compensation for lost properties on the steps of parliament and publicly rejected their claims. Although pilloried by some for this response, the later opening of the compensation floodgates served only to encourage and even institutionalise the newfound role of the militants. In January 2000, the Malaita Eagle Forces raided the armoury in Auki (on Malaita) and by April,

¹⁸ Bennett, *Pacific Forest*, p. 345.

¹⁹ Alasia, S., 'Party Politics and Government in Solomon Islands', *State, Society & Governance in Melanesia*, Discussion paper, 97/7, 1997, p. 13.

²⁰ Bennett, *Pacific Forest*, p. 345.

²¹ Bennett, *Pacific Forest*, pp. 341-2; Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom*, pp. 40-41.

²² Hughes, T., 'Lessons from a False Dawn: Outcomes of the Solomon Islands Police and Structural Reform Programme, 1997-2000', Unpublished Paper, 6 October 2001, p. 12.

²³ Kabutaulaka, T 'Solomon Islands', in 'Political Reviews: Melanesia', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 11, (2), 1999, pp. 443-449.

²⁴ Office of the Prime Minister, 'Beneath Guadalcanal: The Underlying Cause of the Ethnic Tension', 24 February 2000, p. 7.

the government had lost control of the security situation. The Ulufa'alu government was dislodged by the joint Police Field Force/Malaita Eagle Forces coup of June 5th 2000. In the wake of the coup, it was the grouping associated with Mamaloni that resumed office, although with Ulufa'alu's sacked Finance Minister Manasseh Sogavare now becoming Prime Minister. Behind-the-scenes, the key power-broker was Malaitan politician Charles Dausabea, who had previously been Home Affairs Minister under Mamaloni in 1993 and chief whip in the 1994-97 Mamaloni government.

The 2001 elections found the opposition in a much weakened state, largely owing to the fraught experience of coup and crisis. Gathering together at the Mendana Hotel, it comprised a loose association of former SIAC ministers, including the Liberal and Labour parties and those who had become known as 'independent of the independents' to distinguish them from those aligned with the only vaguely coherent AIMP.²⁵ Deposed Prime Minister Ulufa'alu's leadership of the coalition was challenged, ostensibly on the grounds that his return to office might spark a further coup.²⁶ Temotu politician Patteson Oti instead emerged as the favoured SIAC candidate for Prime Minister, leading Ulufa'alu to withdraw his small Liberal grouping and contest separately. The opposition split weakened its claim to office, and several drifting MPs instead joined the PAP/AIMP in backing Kemakeza. Claims that up to S\$50,000 had been offered to MPs circulated widely, although there were no prosecutions.²⁷

After RAMSI's arrival in July 2003, the coherence of the opposition group was still further weakened by defections. Even successive Leaders of the Opposition, first Patteson Oti and then John Garo, crossed the floor to join the Kemakeza government. Two attempted 'no confidence' votes had failed in 2002, before RAMSI's arrival; the first had been withdrawn before being put to a vote and the second was defeated. After mid-2003, the likelihood of the Kemakeza government being dislodged seemed ever more remote. Opposition leaders switching sides explained their action as driven by a desire for positions of responsibility, or pressure from constituents, but self-interest and hunger for power played their part. This consolidation of government was encouraged, particularly by the Australian High Commission but also by the European Union, although a desire to avoid accusations of 'foreign interference' ensured that such advice was rarely formal. Routine informal diplomatic messages of approval or disapproval sufficed, whether or not these were driven by directives from Canberra or Brussels.

'No confidence' votes were discouraged as destabilising, echoing the growing emphasis on establishing order along the Melanesian 'arc of instability'. Getting competent MPs into cabinet also appeared pragmatic, owing to the poor track record of the original grouping of PAP/AIMP ministers, so vividly demonstrated by the numerous sackings for corruption or complicity in militant activities over 1998-2003. One leading light on the opposition benches, Fred Fono, told supporters that he was encouraged to cross the floor by Australian and British High Commission requests to enable European Community STABEX funds to be transferred.²⁸ Yet another former minister in the SIAC government, Alfred Sasako, switched sides to assume sacked MEF minister Alex Bartlett's Agriculture portfolio in September 2004.²⁹ The short-term advantages of encouraging a 'national unity' cabinet under

²⁵ Alfred Sasako, 'The Election of Sir Allan', *Solomon Star*, 20th December 2001.

²⁶ SIBC, 15th December 2001.

²⁷ Roughan, J. 'Joy to Grief Overnight', *Solomon Star*, 18th December 2001

²⁸ 'Fono vows to tap Stabex Fund', *Solomon Star*, 7th February 2005; 'EU to release \$96m for 3 projects in SI', *Solomon Star*, 14th July 2005; Terry Brown, email circular to Anthropology in Oceania network, 22nd April 2006.

²⁹ 'Solomons opposition MP replaces sacked agriculture minister', Radio New Zealand International, 10th September, 2004.

Kemakeza were readily apparent, but its longer-term political repercussions were to prove much more dangerous.

Anti-RAMSI ministers or politicians almost inevitably ended up, or remained, on the opposition benches, threatening a political realignment around the issue of support or opposition to foreign intervention. Manasseh Sogavare had, early on, established himself as a vocal critic of RAMSI, warning at the onset of the mission that ministers had become 'puppets of foreign governments'.³⁰ He remained on the opposition benches. In January 2005, Francis Zama was sacked as Finance Minister and Patteson Oti as Communications Minister for 'adverse reactions' after they criticized RAMSI during a debate on the mission's annual report.³¹

Outside parliament, former leaders of the Malaita Eagle Forces sought to undermine the mission, and played on disquiet about aspects of the operation as a vehicle for their re-entry into parliament at the forthcoming elections. Charles Dausabea, who had lost his East Honiara seat in 2001, vigorously contested RAMSI's usurpation of Solomon Islands sovereignty, while former MEF Supreme Commander, Andrew Nori, also a candidate at the 2006 polls, sought to challenge the legality of RAMSI's immunity from prosecution under Solomon Islands law, unsuccessfully mimicking the constitutional challenge that had recently ended the first incarnation of Australia's Enhanced Cooperation Programme in neighbouring Papua New Guinea. He came fourth in the race for West Are'are, partly due to unpopularity arising from landowner resistance to his logging schemes in Waisisi. Demands by rebel militants hiding out in the interior of Malaita that Kemakeza resign were taken up by Opposition Spokesman for Good Governance and Justice, Joses Sanga.³² Even Bart Ulufa'alu, once a vociferous enthusiast for Australian intervention, insisted on a timeline for RAMSI.³³ Labour Party leader Joses Tuhanuku, whose strong support had been noted in the debates accompanying the commencement of the mission in Australia's parliament, accused Kemakeza of having become a 'puppet of Australia'.³⁴ Elsina Wainwright, the Canberra-based author of the June 2003 *Our Failing Neighbour* pamphlet setting out a justification for Australian intervention now speculated that 'a realignment of political forces in Honiara could see political support for RAMSI evaporate'.³⁵

The oddity was that the SIAC grouping had been the natural ally of the RAMSI operation; it had been the victim of the June 2000 coup. Yet the absence of Australian intervention at that time had left some legacy of bitterness. The apparent reluctance of RAMSI to pursue prosecutions against Kemakeza, and the practicalities of trying to dislodge a well-entrenched incumbent, potentially handed the opposition an otherwise lacking focal point for the 2006 campaign. Yet the opposition was not consistently or unanimously anti-RAMSI. Knowledge that political alignments were fluid, and that the ties that bound ministers to the Kemakeza government might evaporate in the wake of the polls, made a waiting-game seem the more tactically astute option. The operation still had overwhelming public support, despite

³⁰ 'Solomons Parliament Indicates Support for Intervention', ABC, 9 July 2003; 'We'll Be Puppets: Pacific Leader', *The Australian*, 10 July 2003.

³¹ 'Kemakeza fires two Solomon Islands Ministers', *Solomon Star*, February 4th 2005; 'Axe Solomon Islands Minister Blames Australia', *Solomon Star*, 4th February 2005.

³² *Solomon Star*, 10th May 2005; 'Solomon Lawmaker calls for Kemakeza probe', *Solomon Star*, 13th May 2005.

³³ 'Ulu wants RAMSI to leave by 2010', *Solomon Star*, 16th December, 2005.

³⁴ *Solomon Star*, 17th February 2006. For the debates in Australia, see Hansard 12th August 2003, <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/rep/dailys/dr120803.pdf>.

³⁵ Wainwright, E., 'How is RAMSI Faring? Progress, Challenges and Lessons Learned', ASPI Strategic Insights, April 2005, p. 5.

disquiet about Australian heavy-handedness, failure to respond to local anxieties and the absence of sufficient emphasis on the regional aspect of the intervention.³⁶ Despite these good reasons, it stands to the credit of some leading opposition politicians that they did not seek to collectively realign around hostility to RAMSI. The better option was to use the hiatus occasioned by RAMSI to rebuild a potential for local leadership, and to seek to undermine the social weight of those still potentially powerful former militant leaders operating behind the scenes of Solomon Islands politics.

FORCES OF FRACTIONALISATION

As the curtains rose on the 2006 polls, outcomes were thus highly uncertain, particularly given the widely expected high attrition-rate for sitting members. Local-level contests turned out to be highly competitive. 453 candidates stood for election, an average of 9.1 per constituency (up from 6.6 percent in 2001). One result was that the average share of the vote secured by victors fell to 30.8 percent, the lowest figure since independence. Half of all MPs obtained less than 30 percent of the vote (see table 1). Only two MPs secured majorities of the constituency vote, although the unopposed Job Dudley Tausinga standing in North New Georgia clearly had unanimous backing from his constituents, who are renowned for solidly supporting the pre-selected Christian Fellowship Church candidate. He had obtained 74 percent of the vote in 2001, and in 2006 was embarking on his sixth consecutive term in office. More generally, the west of the group had lower than average numbers of candidates and higher than average victor vote shares, while Isabel, Guadalacanal, Malaita and Makira had larger numbers of candidates, and lower victors vote shares. So too did Honiara, where the miniscule turnout lent a particularly arbitrary character to electoral outcomes. The most contested constituency in the country was East Honiara with 20 candidates, where Charles Dausabea emerged victorious with 23.4 percent of the vote (or the support of 6.3 percent of the registered voters), re-taking the seat he held in 1993 and 1997.³⁷

³⁶ Pacific Islands Forum, Eminent Persons Group, 'A Review of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands', May 2005; Solomon Islands Government 'Report of the Foreign Relations Committee on "The Report of the Forum Eminent Persons Group"', National Parliamentary Paper, No. 3 of 2005, May 2005; Solomon Islands Government, Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee, 'Report on the Receipt, Administration and Management of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands', National Parliamentary Paper, no. 17 of 2004, December 2004.

³⁷ In the week before the election, Dausabea converted his house into a kind of hospitality centre for confirmed supporters, and on election day took them in groups of twenty to the polling station, bringing them back for refreshment thereafter (personal communication, Bishop Terry Brown, 31st August 2006).

Table 1: Selected Features of Solomon Islands Elections Since Independence, 1980-2006

Year of Election:	1980	1984 ¹	1989	1993	1997	2001	2006
Average No. Candidates	6.3	6.8	6.8	5.9	6.7	6.6	9.1
Share new members (%) ²	68.4	56.8	52.6	42.6	52.0	64.0	50.0
Incumbent Turnover (%) ²	52.6	40.5	42.1	14.9	38.0	52.0	46.0
Number of Constituency Victors by Percentage Vote Share:							
>50 % & Unopposed	6	9	8	17	12	10	3
40-49	5	6	6	5	7	7	5
30-39	14	12	13	14	15	15	17
20-29	11	7	10	5	10	16	25
10-20	2	3	1	6	6	2	0
0-9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Seats in Parliament:	38	37 ¹	38	47	50	50	50

Notes: ¹ No election held in East Kwaio in 1984.² Incumbent turnover and sitting member figures relate to general elections only, and are insensitive to by-election results.

One reason for the historically high level of candidates contesting was the absence of distinctive political issues at the local level separating the candidates. Where elections pit acknowledged conservative against reformist candidates or where other popularly accepted issues divide political parties, pressure is often exerted on weaker candidates to step aside to avoid splitting the vote for like-minded candidates (or parties). If there is no common consensus about what the electoral issues are, contests become a free-for-all, without much constraint on the number of contestants entering the race. Efforts to create a unified opposition to an incumbent MP did occur in some constituencies (such as West Kwara’ae), and in others sitting members bribed potential rivals not to contest. But, in most cases, there was little restraint on candidate proliferation.

Those national-level campaign issues that did emerge exerted a marginal influence on constituency outcomes. Rural development was championed particularly in Honiara and the west, but this was a programme most aspiring politicians agreed upon in principle, in the process undermining its potential as a focal point for political crystallization. Guale politician Francis Orodani launched a Solomon First Party, committed to pressing the government to make good on Townsville Peace Agreement commitments and enact the draft federal constitution.³⁸ Yet ‘state government’, like rural development, was an issue of ostensible consensus, however much those who stood to lose from this sought to undermine the passage of the draft constitution through procedural complications, absenteeism and stone-walling.³⁹

³⁸ *Solomon Star*, 23rd March 2006; ‘One Nation Party Wants Agreement Implemented’, *The Pacific Magazine*, 16th March 2006.

³⁹ The Constitutional (Amendment) Bill 2005 was defeated in November 2005 not due to direct opposition, but owing to the absence of so many sitting members that it proved impossible to reach the required majority (three quarters of the house or 38 MPs) (*Daily Hansard*, 8th November 2005).

Promises of devolution, greater provincial autonomy and reconciliation between Guadalcanal and Malaita were standard soapbox patter for politicians across the group. Solomon Islands recognition of Taiwan proved another potential focal point, owing to some opposition politicians engaging in negotiations with representatives from mainland China and controversies about the influence of Taiwanese aid funding in the election. Rennell and Bellona MP Joses Tuhanuku claimed that, aside from picking up the tab for the Rural Constituency Development Funds (RCDF), the Taiwanese were funding clandestine 'special projects' through the Prime Minister's Office which were granted only to politically sympathetic allies.⁴⁰ Yet foreign entanglements were scarcely a priority for hard-pressed villagers, despite an understandable readiness to accept assistance from any source.

Some local-level issues played a significant role in the campaign. The long-running strike of workers at Russell Islands Plantations Estates Ltd contributed to the fall of Kemakeza's vote share from 60 percent in 2001 to 30 percent in 2006 in his Savo/Russells constituency. Irate Russell Islanders refused to release the ballot boxes for passage to the Central Division counting centre at Tulagi off the nearby island of Gela, fearing official ballot-rigging. East Malaita's Joses Sanga argued in favour of restricting naturalized citizens' rights to contest in the election.⁴¹ Similarly, 'non-indigenes and naturalized citizens should not be allowed to stand as candidates in any Guadalcanal constituency' stated one of the resolutions of the Guadalcanal Leaders Summit at Balasuna on 14-18th February 2005.⁴² Yet this did not stop naturalized Chinese citizen Laurie Chan returning as MP for West Guadalcanal. Most politicians promised constituency rewards if they were elected to office, and contests were decided by local verdicts about the personal integrity (or otherwise) of candidates. That type of focus was to a greater degree than at previous elections echoed at the national-level, owing to the Civic Education Project, the 'Winds of Change' campaign, the impact of decisions by the Leadership Code Commission and the 'good governance' agenda propagated by increasingly vociferous civil society organisations, with encouragement from RAMSI and the Honiara-based diplomatic fraternity.

Under first-past-the-post systems, as in the Solomon Islands, candidate proliferation can prove self-reinforcing; the more candidates that enter the fray, the smaller the share of the vote required for victory and the easier it appears for an aspiring candidate to win. Nevertheless, candidate proliferation does not mimic PNG's long-run increase, election after election.⁴³ In the Solomon Islands, the average number of candidates per constituency had always been high (averaging 6.5 over 1980-2001), but it spiked in 2006 to reach 9.1 per constituency (see Table 1). There were thus specific reasons for the 2006 upswing in candidate numbers.

Most importantly, the arrival of RAMSI and the consequently transformed political situation had generated enormous uncertainties about political leadership. Although there had been by-elections in the constituencies of the three convicted Malaita Eagle Force ministers in the post-2001 cabinet and in the South Guadalcanal constituency of murdered MP Father

⁴⁰ Tuhanuku, 'Aid or Corruption', *Solomon Star*, 21st March 2006; see also the rather inconsistent responses from Taiwanese Ambassador Antonio Chen and Kemakeza (*Solomon Star*, 21st March 2006 and 3rd March 2006), and the subsequent contributions from Joses Sanga, Alfred Sasako and Speaker of the House Sir Peter Kenilorea (*Solomon Star*, 24th March 2006, 29th March 2006 and 28th March 2006).

⁴¹ 'Exclude non-natives: MP', *Solomon Star*, 14th February 2006.

⁴² Guadalcanal Leaders Summit Communique, 18th February 2005.

⁴³ In the wake of the 2002 elections, PNG switched from first-past-the-post to a limited preferential voting system. For data on number of candidates per constituency in PNG, see Jon Fraenkel, 'Electoral Engineering in Papua New Guinea: Lessons from Fiji and Elsewhere', *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2004. What is said here is also true of Vanuatu, although that country uses a single nontransferable vote system (see Howard Van Trease, 'The Operation of the Single Non-Transferable Vote System', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2005, pp. 296-332).

Augustine Geve, most other MPs had held their seats since 2001. In the intervening period, many new influences affected the fortunes of local leaders. First, RAMSI’s arrival and the arrest of militants and confiscation of weapons meant links with the militias or those carrying guns was no longer a viable method of controlling political power. Second, economic collapse during 2001-2, and the subsequent recovery of rural logging activity, had assisted some political aspirants, but damaged the fortunes of others. Third, regular cabinet reshuffles at Kemakeza’s instigation left many casualties, for whom loss of prestigious portfolios potentially also entailed subsequent electoral defeat. Only half of those in the cabinet formed after the 2001 polls still held ministerial positions immediately prior to the 2006 election.

THE GENDER DIMENSION

The Solomon Islands 2001-2006 government had not a single woman member (see Table 2). Since independence, only one woman has ever been elected to parliament in the country (Hilda Kari 1993-2001). For the 2006 polls, 26 women contested, half of whom had the

Table 2: Representation by Gender Group in the Solomon Islands, 1980-2006

	Candidates		MPs	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
1980	0	242	0	38
1984	1	245	0	37
1989	3	254	0	38
1993	11	269	1	46
1997	12	321	1	49
2001	13	315	0	50
2006	26	425	0	50

Note: No election held in East Kwaio in 1984.

backing of the National Council of Women. This was the largest number of women candidates ever to contest a Solomon Islands election. Women had played an important role in the Solomon Islands peace process, and many hoped this would translate into representation in parliament. Yet not a single female candidate gained a seat.

Some women contestants came close. Sarah Dyer, standing in West Honiara, came second ahead of well-known politicians like the incumbent Yukio Sato and trades unionist David Tuhanuku, but she lost out to Isaac Inoke, who was able to draw on strong support from the sizeable Fataleka community in the critically important White River area. In central Honiara, three women candidates split the vote, and Nelson Ne’e emerged victorious through a crowded field. On Malaita, Afu Billy had in 2001 come within only two votes of victory. Back then, she had lost out to Joses Sanga, who subsequently emerged as one of the more prominent new opposition MPs and easily re-took the East Malaita seat in 2006 with 46 percent of the vote. Other new women candidates on Malaita, such as Rachel Fera in Aoke-Langalanga, notched up a significant share of the vote, but neither she nor civil society activist Mathew Wale could dislodge the well-known incumbent, former Prime Minister Bart Ulufa’alu. Where women candidates were not permanently resident in their constituencies - as with Alice Pollard

in West Are'are and Doreen Kuper on Makira - they inevitably faced an uphill battle. In the aftermath of the election, the National Women's Council called, again, for quotas for women, a proposal which, given the absence of strong political parties in Solomon Islands, would require the introduction of some reserved seats for women.⁴⁴

INCUMBENT TURNOVER

Historically, Solomon Islands has witnessed a high turnover of sitting members. As Table 1 shows, in 1997, 52 percent of those elected were new members, and, in 2001, an extraordinary 62 percent of those elected had not previously been in parliament. Since the 1990s, sweeping changes in parliament's make-up have often, perhaps a little naively, been seen as indicative of popular backing for reform. Part of the reason for this view was because of the way government funds were deployed under the 1990-93 Mamaloni government to assist MPs to retain their seats, resulting in the lowest level of defeat of sitting members witnessed at any post-independence election in 1993 (see Table 1). Prior to the April 2006 elections, many had expected a similarly high level of incumbent turnover to 2001. There were good reasons for this view. In July 2005, provincial elections in Choiseul and the Western Province had seen, respectively, 75 percent and 85 percent of members losing their seats.⁴⁵ Yet in the 2006 general elections, the share of new members across the entire country was 50 percent, closer to the historical average. Local economic conditions help to explain the variation in turnover-rates in different parts of the group owing to their impact on local leadership. On Choiseul and in the Western Province, all the MPs bar one were returned to office, and the one casualty lost by only two votes after a recount. On Isabel and in Honiara, all the incumbents lost their seats. On Malaita, Guadalcanal and Makira, the picture was much more varied.

Holding a ministerial portfolio exerted some influence over re-election prospects, but the potential downside was longer absence from the constituency on official business. At 55 percent, the ministerial survival-rate was only a little higher than the average rate of incumbent re-election (46 percent). Of the nine ministers who lost, many faced popular hostility owing to incompetence or mismanagement, or because they supplemented their marriages with mistresses (popularly called 'O2s' and 'O3s' after the names of the Australian donated patrol boats usually docked at the Point Cruz harbour in Honiara). High profile casualties from the former cabinet included Walton Naezon (Central Guadalcanal), the former Minister of Mines, and Michael Maena (Temotu Pele), who had been sacked as a minister by Kemakeza after being charged with embezzlement of US\$150,000.⁴⁶ Three government-side MPs who had been found guilty of misconduct by the Leadership Code Commission, Alfred Sasako, Stephen Paeni and chairman of the government caucus, Jeffrey Teava, also lost their seats. The good, or bad, governance issue had a discernible impact on outcomes. Minister of National Planning and Aid Coordination Fred Fono secured 55 percent of the vote in West Kwara'ae (Malaita). His pre-election release of documents covering expenditures of Rural Constituency Development Funds was widely applauded, in a campaign where revelations of abuse of such funds regularly sealed the fate of sitting members.⁴⁷ Yet even Fono was subsequently accused of offering cash for support prior to the May 4th 2006 contest to be Prime Minister.⁴⁸ There

⁴⁴ *Solomon Star*, 11th April 2006. For an analysis of the likely impact of quotas aimed at influencing party candidate selection, see Fraenkel, J., 'The Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Pacific Parliaments', Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Research to Advance Women's Political Representation in Forum Island Countries, April 2006.

⁴⁵ 'Incumbent MPs Routed in Provincial Elections', Radio Australia, Pacific Beat, 5th July 2005.

⁴⁶ 'Sacked Solomon Islands Minister Refuses to go', *Radio New Zealand International*, 2nd March 2005.

⁴⁷ 'Fono Releases Report on RCDF Funding', *Solomon Star*, 9th March 2006.

⁴⁸ *Solomon Star*, 25th May 2006.

were no public denials, confirming the view that this type of practice is extraordinarily widespread.

Political survival is perpetually precarious even for ministers, but judicious construction of patronage networks can stave off defeat. Long-run survivors, like Prime Minister Kemakeza, carefully lavished expenditures on target voters.⁴⁹ In March 2005, he handed over \$20,000 cash to his main potential rival for the Savo/Russell constituency, former MP John Ngina.⁵⁰ Former Minister of Finance, Peter Boyers, New Zealand-born but married locally and well-versed in Melanesian ways, distributed water tanks across his West New Georgia constituency. Other well-endowed businessmen or recipients of plentiful logging revenues, like Laurie Chan in West Guadalcanal and Snyder Rini in Morovo, proved able to retain their seats in an election which, despite the new multiple ballot box system, witnessed numerous allegations in the letters pages of the *Solomon Star* that MPs were buying votes.

On the opposition side of the house, veteran politicians who were household names, such as Bart Ulufa'alu, Francis Billy Hilly and Leslie Boseto, kept their seats. There was one high profile opposition casualty: Joses Tuhanuku came fourth in the race for the Rennell and Bellona constituency. Even before the election, he had claimed to be the victim of a concerted Taiwanese-funded effort to dislodge him.⁵¹ More usually, defeated incumbents were the least well-known at the national-level, or those long absent from their constituencies. As on the government side of the house, well-endowed MPs with access to local logging revenues, or other sources of income, fared better than the more cash-strapped candidates. Even veteran MPs associated with reformist objectives found the procurement of political support difficult to avoid, and circulated small sums of cash to voters often on the last night before the polls ('the devil's night') or flirted on the borders of legality by promising constituents monetary handouts at a fixed date after the election. Overall, the 2006 elections exhibited a familiar Melanesian pattern; extraordinarily high incumbent turnover at the rank-and-file level coupled with exceptionally low incumbent turnover for a small cluster of established political leaders.

PARTIES AND OUTCOMES

Kemakeza's People's Alliance Party launched its manifesto under the slogan 'Vote PAP to Rebuild this Nation', urging a platform of 'restoration of national unity and peace', and calling RAMSI a 'god given gift to the people of this country'. The party promised to field 50 official candidates covering all of the nation's constituencies, as well as an additional collection of 'shadow candidates'.⁵² It charged \$70 for a copy of the manifesto, suggesting some restriction of access to state coffers under the new tighter controls exercised by hard-nosed Australian officials. If, as some suggested, there was a substantial pot of Taiwanese cash funding Kemakeza sympathisers, there was little sign of this having any substantial impact on political allegiances. Most of those MPs and other officials affiliated with the PAP back in 2001 had drifted away in the intervening years, or saw the writing on the wall for Kemakeza. Robert Goh, the Prime Minister's prosperous so-called 'dollar a year' adviser over the years since the 2001 polls, played little public role in the campaign, although his private residence was later burnt to the ground by angry rioters. The *Solomon Star* ran headlines such as 'PM Urged to Come Clean' and 'Erase Sir Allan Now', reinforcing the already strong popular perception of Kemakeza's government as 'corrupt'.⁵³ The Prime Minister made no major statements of

⁴⁹ 'Kemakeza Gives \$2,700 to Home Island in Solomons', SIBC, March 9th 2005.

⁵⁰ 'Leadership Begins at Home: PM', *Solomon Star*, 10th March 2005.

⁵¹ 'Taiwan Denies Bribery Claims', *Solomon Star*, 10th March 2006.

⁵² *Solomon Star*, 6th February 2006; *Solomon Star*, 27th January 2006.

⁵³ *Solomon Star*, 17th March 2006; *Solomon Star*, 29th March 2006.

policy or vision during the campaign. On many weekends, Kemakeza went to his home island of Savo or to Yandina on the Russell Islands, clearly focussing first and foremost on the anticipated tough battle to retain his own seat.

Other parties were just as diffuse. The Lafari Party, a new organisation appealing to public servants, secured two MPs, and had during the campaign pledged to assist the PAP in stabilising the country. Yet its leaders, the floor-crossers John Garo and Alfred Sasako, both lost their seats, and the two successful Lafari MPs joined the PAP immediately after the election.⁵⁴ In February 2006, National President of the AIMP, Tommy Chan launched a 'statement of policy 2006' also pledging to assist with 'stabilisation', along with the usual platitudes about support for 'reconciliation' and 'healing'. It never released a list of candidates, preferring to pursue the amorphous strategy of claiming to articulate the aspirations of those who failed to lodge any party affiliation. Party affiliations are always difficult to establish in Solomon Islands politics. Candidates often double-list themselves, or shift allegiances, particularly in the days just before the prime ministerial vote. Table 3 provides affiliations given by the MPs themselves at the time of the April 18th prime ministerial election.

Table 3: Party Affiliations of Elected MPs as of April 18th 2006

Solomon Islands Social Credit Party	2
People's Alliance Party	6
Nasonol Pati	6
Solomon Islands Party for Rural Advancement	4
Solomon Islands Liberal Party	2
Democratic Party	5
Association of Independent Members	11
Independents	14
Total:	50

Source: party affiliations as of 18th April 2006, compiled with assistance from David Kusilifu, Machinery of Government Program.

On the opposition side, party affiliations were only slightly more meaningful. Bart Ulufa'alu published conflicting listings of sponsored candidates for his Liberal Party in the *Solomon Star*, several of whom responded by writing letters to the newspaper denying such allegiances.⁵⁵ His party secured only two MPs, reducing Ulufa'alu's chances in the leadership contest. Francis Billy Hilly's Nasonol Pati (National Party) gained six members, including Billy Hilly himself, Leslie Boseto, Patteson Oti and Joses Sanga. The latter argued for legislation to strengthen the party system, including PNG-style laws against floor-crossing and provisions for public funding for political parties.⁵⁶ Ironically, Sanga, Oti and Boseto were all to resign from the Nasonol Pati shortly after the elections, so that they could remain in Cabinet in the wake of Billy Hilly's sacking (in a manner that might have been illegal had the legislation they proposed been enacted).⁵⁷ Responding to national debates about the pivotal role villagers had played in leading the 2002-2006 economic recovery, western politicians launched a Solomon

⁵⁴ 'Lafari Pledges Stability', *Solomon Star*, 21st March 2006.

⁵⁵ 'Liberals Vie for 38 Seats', *Solomon Star*, 28th February, 2006; 'Former MPs Refute Liberal's Claim', *Solomon Star*, 28th February 2006.

⁵⁶ 'Nasonol Pati to Legislate SI Political Party System', *Solomon Star*, 16th March 2006.

⁵⁷ 'Parliamentarians Resign from National Party', SIBC, 18th August 2006.

Islands Party for Rural Advancement (SIPRA), led by former Permanent Secretary for Finance Gordon Darcy Lilo. SIPRA was new, while the Liberal and Nasonal parties had been in hibernation since the 2001 polls. With twelve MPs altogether, these three parties formed the core of the opposition.

On the maverick fringe of Solomon Islands politics, Manasseh Sogavare launched a Solomon Islands Social Credit Party (SoCred) in July 2005, backed by Filipino businessman Ramon Quitales. It campaigned on a platform of hostility to both foreign banks as well as the Central Bank of the Solomon Islands, urging peculiar monetary reforms aimed at relieving national indebtedness.⁵⁸ Only one SoCred candidate other than Sogavare was successful: Temotu MP Clay Forau, a first-time MP who played the side-switching game with sufficient versatility to earn himself portfolios in both the Rini and Sogavare cabinets. Five successful MPs had affiliated themselves with the Democratic Party by April 18th, the brainchild of private lawyer Gabriel Suri. But this barely figured as a cohesive entity and party affiliations exerted little influence over candidates' subsequent alliances. Francis Orodani's Solomon First Party vanished without trace, as did several other virtual reality parties that had made fleeting public appearances prior to the polls. Efforts to encourage a re-birth for the 1970s and 1980s United Party triggered denunciations after Chairman of the Electoral Commission and Speaker of the House Sir Peter Kenilorea assumed the presidency of the party. Sir Peter responded that his actions had in no way violated the constitution,⁵⁹ prompting Forum observers to respond that the issue was one of propriety rather than legality, and that the assumption of such a position 'damages the appearance of impartiality of the Commission'.⁶⁰ In the event, none of the United Party candidates captured a seat. In total, only 26 of those elected as MPs had party affiliations or had acquired these by April 18th, implying that the remaining 24 were independents. Ten of these were associated with the quasi-formal AIMP grouping led by Snyder Rini and Tommy Chan, but 14 were genuinely unaffiliated or watching closely which way the political winds blew.

The 44-strong international observer team found that 'the polling process was transparent and well-conducted, and voters were able to exercise a free and secret vote'.⁶¹ Elsewhere in the world, election observation missions are watchdogs against gross fraud or ballot-rigging. Such missions are less well equipped to deal with the subtle irregularities that occur behind the back of the formal election process in countries like Solomon Islands. The 2001 election had been declared 'free and fair', despite substantial voter intimidation by armed militants, particularly on North Malaita and South Guadalcanal. In 2006, guns were not a factor influencing voting patterns, but efforts to purchase votes were nevertheless widespread, whether or not this breached the Electoral Act's un-enforced S\$50,000 limit on campaign expenditures. Despite the limited purview of the international election observers, their conclusions provided a confidence-building influence and a counter-weight to some of the more outrageous 'tok stori' claims that circulated. Before the April 5th polls, former Governor General Sir Baddley Devesi had advised foreign observers to stay on to scrutinize the subsequent prime ministerial election. UN Observer Mission Coordinator Steve Wagensil responded that the prime ministerial election process, conducted behind closed doors, lacked sufficient transparency to be susceptible to overseas observation.⁶² Most international observers had left the country prior to the Easter weekend.

⁵⁸ PacNews 25th July 2005; 'Party Blames Government for Poor Economy', PacNews, 27th September 2005.

⁵⁹ Letter, *Solomon Star*, 21st February 2006.

⁶⁰ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 'Report of the Pacific Islands Forum Observer Team', 11th April 2006, Honiara.

⁶¹ International Electoral Observers (Pacific Islands Forum, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, USA), 'Interim Statement', 7th April 2006.

⁶² 'Post-Election Observers Unlikely: Wagensil', *Solomon Star*, 9th March 2006.

THE SECOND ELECTION

As the results flowed in to Honiara, so too did the newly elected and returned MPs. The alternative groupings settled in at the Honiara Hotel, owned by Chinese businessman Tommy Chan, and at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel owned by Alex Wong, another local Chinese businessman and naturalized citizen. Tommy Chan, National President of the AIMP, welcomed members with an advert in the *Solomon Star* congratulating them and announcing that 'the people of Solomon Islands have again entrusted you with the responsibility of ensuring that this country they love to call home and its multiracial population is well governed and properly cared for. Your electors have given you the support you needed and now it is your turn to honour that support'.⁶³ This was an attempt to generate consolidation in an otherwise fluid setting, a familiar Melanesian bandwagon strategy aimed at encouraging wavering MPs to gather behind a plausible victor. Of the 21 listed in the advert, at least eleven had no clear association with AIMP.⁶⁴ On the top of that list was Snyder Rini, and the following day the AIMP leader and Tommy Chan walked together into the Flamingo nightclub, next to the Honiara Hotel, claiming 24 backers for an AIMP government, and publicly announcing the end of the coalition with Kemakeza. All eleven of the ministers who had secured re-election associated themselves with the Snyder Rini camp.

This was an unwelcome development for Australian diplomats; as an embarrassing leaked email from a subsequently hurried home RAMSI official later acknowledged, Australian High Commissioner Patrick Cole had apparently been working hard behind-the-scenes to avoid Snyder Rini capturing the top job: 'Cole said he had talked to Tommy and [his son] Laurie Chan as to why Rini had been selected given that they had given him assurances that he wouldn't be', wrote Mick Shannon; 'looks like Tommy Chan's main business interest is in getting a second casino license and he can no doubt depend on Rini for that'.⁶⁵ In itself, the revelation of Australian manoeuvring behind-the-scenes in Solomon Islands politics was hardly surprising. Perhaps more disturbing was the view expressed that as a result of the anticipated loss of Peter Boyers as Finance Minister 'we will end up with no effective voice in cabinet to guide economic and fiscal policy'. Patrick Cole refused to comment about 'what an individual may or may not have said about what may or may not have been going on', and faced down the calls for his resignation.⁶⁶ The Australian High Commissioner viewed Kemakeza as 'the best of a bad bunch' and as an accomplished master at the parliamentary 'numbers game'. Cole had long pursued a bilateral agenda that occasionally departed from the studied neutrality sought by RAMSI. He supported the adoption of PNG-style integrity legislation in the Solomon Islands, including 'grace periods' during which 'no confidence' votes could not dislodge governments and rules against MPs crossing the floor.⁶⁷

The initial bid to assemble a rival coalition came from East Honiara MP Charles Dausabea, who claimed the support of eight members and demanded an alternative to Kemakeza. This was still less welcome for Australian diplomats than having Rini as Prime Minister. The Prime Minister had 'crossed the line in terms of sovereignty', declared Dausabea, criticizing Australian interference in cabinet decision-making and associated breaches of national security.⁶⁸ Dausabea rejected having as a Prime Minister someone from

⁶³ *Solomon Star*, 10th April 2006.

⁶⁴ In some cases, only the constituencies were announced, presumably because when written up the victors were still unknown.

⁶⁵ *Solomon Star*, 9th May 2005.

⁶⁶ *Solomon Star*, 3rd May 2006.

⁶⁷ Personal communications [anonymous].

⁶⁸ SIBC, 16th April 2006.

either Malaita or Guadalcanal, suggesting that this was 'too early after the ethnic tension'.⁶⁹ That comment, as well as Dausabea's tarnished reputation both during the 1998-99 unrest and as behind-the-scenes power-broker after the 2000 coup, generated a flurry of hostile criticism.⁷⁰ Yet it played to familiar gallery in Solomon Islands politics. Even before the 1998-2003 tensions, candidates for Prime Minister who were not from Malaita or Guadalcanal, like Makira's Mamaloni, had faced an easier ride than Kenilorea or Ulufa'alu (Malaita) or Alebua (Guadalcanal). In the wake of the Isatabu uprising, both Sogavare (Choiseul) and Kemakeza (Savo) had traded off their origins. Disturbingly, the anti-Malaita directive ruled out as potential Prime Ministers the two politicians popularly associated with the younger generation often perceived, whether rightly or wrongly, as promising a more competent, honest, and reform-oriented style of leadership, Joses Sanga and Fred Fono.

On Thursday 12th April, a new coalition was announced, bringing together three former Prime Ministers, Bart Ulufa'alu, Francis Billy Hilly, and Manasseh Sogavare. It claimed 30 members, including those from the SIPRA, the Nasonol Pati and the Liberals. Charles Dausabea had joined the group. In Solomon Islands *realpolitik*, having such a brutal presence as that of Dausabea belonging to the loosely knit, tactically ill-astute and soft-hearted opposition potentially made the difference in the fluid but hard-fought struggle for the prime ministerial post. Two opposition MPs arriving from the east were unexpectedly whisked away by Tommy Chan's henchmen to the Honiara Hotel. Patteson Oti fetched them away, without their bags, to the opposition headquarters at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel. Police were stopped from collecting their personal possessions by hotel owner Tommy Chan. It was Dausabea who then successfully physically obtained that luggage, and brought it to the opposition headquarters.⁷¹

The inauspicious 2001 splintering of the opposition due to conflicts over the leadership reappeared, although this time the group remained at least partially intact. Before the vote for the opposition candidate for the prime ministerial post commenced, Sogavare broke away, leaving behind a number of disoriented supporters at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel. The opposition continued their internal selection process and, after several rounds of elimination, settled on Job Dudley Tausinga as their candidate for Prime Minister. Other aspirants, like Ulufa'alu, Billy Hilly and Oti held together behind the newly favoured leader, desperate as they were to avoid another term in the wilderness of the opposition. Yet the Sogavare breakaway proved potentially devastating for opposition ambitions. This new third group's headquarters was at the Pacific Casino Hotel, an enterprise owned by yet another Chinese businessman and naturalized citizen, Patrick Leong. It provided a convenient transit station for wavering opportunists, eager to take advantage of prevailing uncertainties to enhance their position in the struggle for prestigious portfolios and/or other rewards.

As realignments in the now tripartite contest commenced, the atmosphere became extraordinarily tense at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel. The new MP for South Guadalcanal, David Day Pacha, was whisked away in a vehicle belonging to local businessman of part-Guale descent Bobo Detke to join Sogavare's group. Dausabea's security guards manning the gates at the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel became greatly agitated and harried visitors, suspecting them of intending to snatch further opposition MPs. Three more of the Guale MPs had also shifted across to the Pacific Casino Hotel, as did several other first-timer or previously non-aligned MPs. The rebel Guale bloc emphasised the presence of Charles Dausabea, due to his notorious links with the Malaita Eagle Forces, as the reason for their flight from the opposition camp. The bills for their rooms and expenses at the Pacific Casino Hotel were widely rumoured

⁶⁹ *Solomon Star*, 11th April 2006.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Transform Aqorau, letter, *Solomon Star*, 13th April 2006.

⁷¹ *Solomon Star*, 13th April 2006.

to be being paid by Bobo Detke (reportedly at a cost of SIS2 million⁷²), and more secretive financiers may plausibly have been operating behind-the-scenes. A 'Winds of Change' advert appeared in the *Solomon Star* headlined 'who will decide our PM?', and explaining 'there is a select group of business, logging and foreign interests that are currently attempting to corrupt our political process and manipulate the election of the new PM so that they can continue to control our nation'.⁷³

In the midst of this fraught coalition-building process, two Taiwanese naval vessels docked in port, and sent sailors from the Wu-Yi Training Squadron to perform kung-fu exercises for onlookers at the National Stadium. The event was accompanied by new announcements by Ambassador Antonio Chen of Taiwanese aid awaiting the incoming government.⁷⁴ New and returned MPs were invited to come aboard the Wu-Yi that evening for a cocktail party. Only a few AIMP members attended, including Peter Boyers and Laurie Chan, as well as the outgoing Prime Minister. Kemakeza told the gathering that his government would be re-elected.⁷⁵ Yet the celebrated 'numbers man' of 2001-6 no longer had sufficient party backing for a bid to remain Prime Minister. His PAP had been reduced to a rump of seven members. One of these, Fred Fono, immediately deserted and joined the AIMP.

Table 4: The April 18th 2006 and May 4th Prime Ministerial Elections

	April 18 th		May 4 th	
	First Round	Second Round		First Round
Snyder Rini	17	27	Fred Fono	22
Job Dudley Tausinga	22	23	Manasseh Sogavare	28
Mannaseh Sogavare	11			

According to the timetable set by Sir Nathaniel Waena, nominations for the Prime Ministership were to close at 4pm on 11th April 2006, and the election was scheduled for 9.30am on Tuesday 18th April. By the close of nominations, all three candidates were from the western part of the group; Snyder Rini, Job Dudley Tausinga and Manasseh Sogavare. Over the long Easter Weekend, coalition fortunes waxed and waned. Numbers appeared increasingly to favour the opposition, and a greater sense of calm prevailed at the gates of the Iron Bottom Sound Hotel. On its own, the Honiara Hotel-based coalition did not have the numbers to win the prime ministerial elections outright. When MPs finally gathered on Vavaya Ridge to select their new Prime Minister, Tausinga was easily ahead at the first count, but four votes short of a clear majority. It was the 11 MPs who sided at the first count with Sogavare who provided the crucial swing-votes. In the second round of voting, ten of these backed Snyder Rini, handing him victory by 27 votes to 23. This was to prove a short-lived triumph. Eight days later, responding to the political shock waves engendered by the riots, six MPs crossed the floor to join an opposition which regrouped around Manasseh Sogavare as their new candidate for Prime Minister. Facing an impending no confidence vote, Rini chose to resign. The Honiara Hotel camp chose Fred Fono as their candidate for second prime ministerial elections, held on May 4th, but he lost by 22 votes to Sogavare's 28. Sogavare consequently became Prime

⁷² Personal communication, Clive Moore, 17th September 2006.

⁷³ *Solomon Star*, 13th April 2006.

⁷⁴ ABC Asia Pacific, 15th April 2006.

⁷⁵ *Solomon Star*, 18th April 2006.

Minister, with Job Dudley Tausinga as Deputy Prime Minister and Bart Ulufa'alu as Finance Minister.

CONCLUSION: RIOTS REVISITED

The riots that broke out on April 18th outside parliament were triggered by a deeply flawed prime ministerial selection process, which not for the first time generated an outcome which bore no relationship to any discernible popular mandate.⁷⁶ The previous government had earned for itself a poor reputation among Solomon Islanders. As we have seen, many ministers had been sacked for embezzlement of funds or after prosecution for involvement in militant activities prior to RAMSI's arrival. Kemakeza's PAP performed poorly at the polls. Its coalition ally, the Snyder Rini-led AIMP, had also suffered high profile casualties. In total, nine of the twenty ministers had lost their seats, as well as the bulk of pro-government backbenchers. Nevertheless, here was the former Deputy Prime Minister leading the core of the old cabinet back into office. Whatever the role of disgruntled politicians in inciting the crowds, the causes of the Honiara riots ran much deeper. The intense level of popular antipathy to the outcome of the prime ministerial election, at least among the hundreds gathered outside parliament on April 18th, was captured in three hours of pilot footage for an intended new Solomon Islands TV station.⁷⁷ There exists no reason to believe that some reservoir of popular support for the former government existed anywhere else in the country.

This was not the first time gatherings outside parliament had reacted in a hostile way to the outcome of a prime ministerial election, even if the response this time around was far more violent. Back in 2001, at the previous such election, Kemakeza's victory had been greeted with such a stunned and disapproving silence that Sir Allan had felt obliged in the midst of his post-election news conference to publicly dismiss his critics as articulating a narrowly urban response.⁷⁸ Previous government changes, for example in 1990 and 1994, were also outcomes of behind-the-scenes manoeuvring by top politicians, and bore no necessary relationship to popular enthusiasm or disdain with the performance of the government of the day. Cautious preparation for disturbances accompanying prime ministerial elections, including deployment of officers to Chinatown, had previously been standard Royal Solomon Islands Police procedure.⁷⁹

Did disappointed politicians plan and spark the disturbances? Two opposition MPs, Charles Dausabea and Nelson Ne'e, were subsequently arrested for inciting the crowds to violence. Some speculated about Dausabea's role in stirring youths to action the night before the riots.⁸⁰ Exiting parliament after Snyder Rini's election, Dausabea allegedly said 'mi fala

⁷⁶ The issue of what reforms might prove effective in such circumstances, including the scope for strengthening political parties and reform of the process of electing Prime Ministers, is discussed in a separate forthcoming paper.

⁷⁷ DVD recording of raw Solomon Islands TV footage taken before, during and after the Prime ministerial election result, including coverage of the subsequent disturbances outside parliament.

⁷⁸ For some anticipation of the potential for hostility to the outcome of the Solomon Islands' two-stage Prime ministerial elections, and a account of the 2001 sequence of events, see Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom*, p136-138.

⁷⁹ Frank Short, 'Honiara Riot Warrants Formal Inquiry', Pacific Islands Report, 22nd May 2006; <http://archives.pireport.org/archive/2006/May/05-24-com.htm>. Solomon Islands born Mike Wheately, the former Assistant Police Commissioner (National Reconnaissance and Surveillance) during 1992-2000 explained: 'It is a standard procedure for the disciplinary forces of Solomon Islands to be on alert during any national election, stepping up as parliament is convened for the election of the Prime Minister. Forces were usually deployed at Parliament House, on the approaches to Chinatown and for other key locations on a direct route from Parliament House. Such a strategy allows one to block or deflect riotous assembly as opposed to the riskier strategy of following it into Chinatown' ('RAMSI Tuesday' wasn't due to Intelligence Failure', <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0605/S00401.htm>).

⁸⁰ Ashley Wickham, 'Pacific in Custody & in Cabinet', 10th May 2006, *New Matilda.com*.

lose nao, iu fala doim what nao iufala likem' ('we've lost, you go ahead and do what you want' – although the Pijin sounds more provocative than the English).⁸¹ The less seasoned Central Honiara MP Nelson Ne'e was blunter; 'dynamitem parliment' ('blow up parliament'), he is said to have told the crowds.⁸² Was this mere trouble-making amidst an already underway popular outrage-driven riot, or had frustrated political leaders transformed an otherwise peaceful protest into a violent one? This is a familiar issue, one that also accompanied Solomon Islands urban unrest in 1989 and 1996, the Isatabu uprising of 1998-99 and various Malaitan demonstrations in Honiara during 1999-2000.⁸³ It is also, in all these cases, impossible to answer definitively, for the Melanesian leader blends into the crowd, and the instigator is rarely easily separated from the instigated. At the time of writing, the courts are entrusted with the responsibility for judging whether politicians incited violence, and a Commission of Enquiry is supposed to establish the causes of the riots. Yet since courts are responsible for establishing guilt or innocence, not ultimate causes, and since the Commission cannot comment on matters before the courts, it seems likely that neither will resolve the broader issue of what was behind the Honiara riots.

The claims that 'trucks' had delivered rocks, 'water bottles' and 'firebombs' to parliament prior to the riots were all false.⁸⁴ Stones hurled at the parliament were readily available on the access road. The torching of the first RAMSI vehicle, supposedly with *The Australian's* petrol-filled 'water bottles', was at least an hour and a half after the initial outbreak of the disturbances outside parliament. Once the crowds veered down towards the town, numerous opportunist elements joined the melee. Back before the crisis-related exodus from Honiara in 2000-2001, urban disturbances in the 1990s had regularly been joined by under-employed youths hanging around aimlessly in Honiara (the notorious 'masta liu'). Renewed expansion of squatter settlements on Honiara's fringes, and the build-up of young and aimless street kids, had become notable features of the Honiara scene over 2002-6, and were always likely to swell the ferocity of even minor urban disturbances.

The claims that RAMSI police tactics sparked the disturbances were overplayed and often inconsistent. Despite a heavy presence, Australian police quickly lost control, and only resorted to usage of tear gas approximately three hours after the commencement of the disturbances outside parliament. Providing a megaphone for respected senior statesman Sir Peter Kenilorea might have helped to calm the crowds, but it requires a big counterfactual stretch to suggest that this would have quelled the unrest. Deputy Commissioner of Police Johnson Siapu claimed that 'the violence and attacks on property at Chinatown and other areas throughout Point Cruz had commenced prior to the deployment of tear gas'.⁸⁵ According to Police Commissioner Shane Castles, the timing was close; 'by 3.15pm ... a crowd in excess of 200 began ransacking both the Sunrise and Wings Supermarkets', and 'at 3.22pm non-lethal (CS) tear gas was deployed at parliament house'.⁸⁶ If so, that was seven minutes later. It requires about five minutes to run, without stumbling, down the steep hill from parliament to Point Cruz. Hence, if this timing is correct, those fleeing from the CS gas outside parliament could only have joined the rioting in the town centre at around 3.27pm, twelve minutes after its commencement.

⁸¹ *Solomon Star*, 26 April 2006

⁸² 'MPs' Bail Opposed', *Solomon Star*, 27th April 2006

⁸³ See Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom*, pp. 64-65, pp. 117-119.

⁸⁴ Samantha Maiden 'Leading Questions', *The Australian* 8th-9th July 2006; 'the fact that elements of the pro-opposition crowd were already armed with petrol spray and fire bombs, and quickly set to incinerating RAMSI vehicles after the initial skirmishes, supports the contention that key members of the opposition group instrumentalised violence for political gain' (Morgan & Macleod, 'Have we failed', pp. 421-2).

⁸⁵ 'Police Reject Claims', *Solomon Star*, 10th May 2006.

⁸⁶ 'Police Chief Replies to Criticisms', *Solomon Star*, 19th May 2006.

Most extraordinary were the claims that Taiwanese funding somehow fuelled the riots. Taiwan had, at times, exercised an ill-advised influence over Solomon Islands politics, both as regards the misconceived EXIM loan in 2001, pre-2006 polls RCDF spending and selective payments routed through Kemakeza's office during the run-up the 2006 polls. The diplomatic fiasco surrounding the ill-timed arrival of the Wu-Yi, and the mid-government formation cocktail party, encouraged increasingly shrill antipodean allegations of Taiwanese political interference in the electoral process. Many also claimed that Taiwanese money influenced the wheeling and dealing in the run-up to the April 18th prime ministerial election. Money does change hands in such elections. Since such transactions are inevitably secretive in one sense, but well-known in another, amounts often tend to get exaggerated. Solomon Islanders' evidence of receipts of bribes arises owing to ostentatious displays by recipients. In close-knit communities, politicians who are suddenly seen to mysteriously acquire, for example, a new four-wheel vehicle or a fancy house are known to be in receipt of unusual sources of income. Such payments usually come from local businesses, would-be casino operators or logging companies seeking to influence the composition and policy direction of the incoming government.

The more important influence over the shaping and re-shaping of Solomon Islands politics over 2003-6 was the Australian presence. Yet even that was limited, as the election first of Snyder Rini and then of Manasseh Sogavare – neither of whom were candidates favoured in Canberra – clearly showed. Australian influence had served to strengthen the Kemakeza government, but it did not extend to determining the outcome of the post-election leadership contest. Nevertheless, the shaping and re-shaping of government and opposition alliances over 2003-6 had showed itself to be extraordinarily susceptible to influence, whether deliberate or inadvertent. Neutrality was impossible, even if it appeared politically indispensable. No serious top-level consideration in Canberra was given to the political ramifications of RAMSI operation, despite the parliamentary reconfiguration that ensued.⁸⁷ For the High Commission, this was a positive consolidation around Kemakeza, even requiring additional legislation to further strengthen the position of government. For RAMSI's Special Coordinator, it was perhaps more problematic, but unfortunately unavoidable owing to the role of the Prime Minister in legitimising the entire operation. Had the legislation so strongly recommended by some Canberra think-tanks been enacted giving incoming governments a 'grace period' when they are immune to 'no confidence' votes, and been accompanied by laws against floor-crossing, the Snyder Rini government might have survived any parliamentary challenge, leaving RAMSI in the impossible situation of having to prop up a deeply unpopular government. Fortunately, such legislation had not been enacted. Nevertheless, the eventual triumph of a now heavily compromised opposition on 4th May 2006 bore all the scars of the reconfiguration of the political order over 2003-6. The way ahead will not be easy.

⁸⁷ Personal Communication (anonymous).