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# Beyond Life Support? Reflections on Solomon Islands after the Regional Assistance Mission

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## Abstract

*The Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands was conceived in the 'state-building moment' that informed Western responses to 'state failure' over the past two decades. That moment has Now passed with renewed fiscal austerity, growing scepticism with interventionism, and shifts in Australia's regional policy priorities. The decade-long mission, which has recently begun to drawdown, was successful in restoring security to Solomons but less so in its more ambitious state-building efforts. Among the key constraints has been the mission's inability to influence a more inclusive political settlement. We highlight inherent tensions between instrumentalised approaches to state building and more organic processes of state formation. Looking forward, we consider how external assistance can contribute to state formation while retaining a focus on the 'life support' objectives of state building. We sketch some possibilities for hybrid forms of institutional development that might combine strengths from both local and liberal orders.*

**Key words:** intervention, state building, Solomon Islands

## 1. Introduction

This article reflects on the origins and efficacy of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and canvasses some broad options for on-going regional and bilateral assistance to Solomon Islands in the post-RAMSI period,[1] with a particular focus on the governance of security in rural areas and its implications for peace and stability. These options are discussed against the backdrop of anticipated economic and security scenarios in Solomons and changing fiscal conditions and development assistance priorities in Australia as well as at the regional and global scales.

We see RAMSI as having been conceived in the global 'state-building moment', as accentuated by the events of 9-11, 2001, when there were palpable concerns about the security threats posed by 'weak' and 'failing' states, and fiscal capacity was no object—certainly not the constraint that it is in the contemporary climate of austerity. The intervention had all the hallmarks of a classic liberal peace intervention and was cited as the exemplar of Australia's 'new interventionism' in the western Pacific, in the heart of the so-called 'arc of instability'. During its 10-year tenure, and since the commencement of its drawdown in 2013, the mission has been extensively appraised,

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1. RAMSI's development programs were concluded on 30 June 2013 and 'transitioned' to bilateral and multilateral development partners. However, RAMSI is still in operation with a pared-down police mission and special coordinators office. The conclusion of these remaining operations is the subject of on-going discussions, with the current police mission likely to conclude in 2017.

assessed and critiqued. While these commentaries vary markedly in orientation and conclusions, they serve to delineate an emerging consensus narrative around RAMSIs accomplishments. This narrative sees the early restoration of security phase of the mission as highly successful but raises questions about the efficacy and costs of its more ambitious state-building objectives.

While RAMSI exhibited an impressive capacity to respond to critique and adapt to change, it was nevertheless constrained by a number of key factors that were not necessarily of its own making. Foremost among these was its inability to influence the political economy of Solomon Islands, especially the critical nexus of politics and the logging industry. Difficulties encountered in engaging with Solomon's 'political settlement' highlight the limitations of 'co-operative intervention', raising, in turn, some important issues for the 'co-production' paradigm in current post-RAMSI discussions. They also foreground a tension between 'state building' as a predictable, technical and linear project; and 'state formation' as a messier, organic and long-term process involving a diverse range of actors, including at the subnational scale.

In the final section of the article, we address the questions of what next for Solomon Islands and, more specifically, how the gains that have been made under RAMSI might be sustained in the contemporary context of fiscal restraint and new priorities for bilateral development assistance and regionalism?[2] We ask how regional and bilateral assistance might be directed to supporting state formation while still maintaining a focus on the 'life-support' objectives of state building. Our attention here is drawn to a body of literature that acknowledges the centrality of violent conflict in the 'long haul' of state formation. In this respect, we draw upon neighbouring

Bougainville as an example of a very different approach to international assistance entailing a light intervention that was conducive to an accommodation between local and liberal institutional agenda. This has given rise to a post-conflict settlement that has been widely referenced as a rare example of a successful 'local-liberal hybrid'.

Referencing recent research on local justice in rural Solomon Islands, we argue that there is strong grassroots appetite for institutions that draw upon the perceived strengths of both local and liberal orders. Rural Solomon Islanders are acutely aware of the growing fragilities of local leadership structures in the face of economic change, which highlights the well-documented dangers of romanticising 'the local' in attempts to instrumentalise hybridity. We propose some options informed by the colonial model of indirect rule and contemporary research on network governance that have succeeded in other Pacific Islands settings facing similar geographical constraints to those of Solomon Islands.

## 2. Why the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands?

### 2.1. Strategic Context

The intervention's narrow focus on state building had its genesis in the strategic framing of state failure and the compelling security imperative that emerged in the wake of the events of 9-11, 2001. This larger framing also lies behind the limited interest, at least in the early phases of the mission, in engaging with non-state institutions and alternative forms of institutional development.

While novel in the Pacific context, the Australian-led intervention in Solomon Islands in 2003 was consistent with broader currents in international relations as they had developed in the post-Cold War period. These included the increasingly interventionist stance from the mid-1990s by the international community, and the United Nations in particular, in conflict-affected countries and regions, and a growing consensus around state building and economic liberalisation as the antidote to

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2. By fiscal restraint, here, we mean the significant cuts made to the Australian budget since 2013. It is important to acknowledge that the Pacific, and Solomon Islands in particular, has been largely insulated from these cuts, and that this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

conflict, instability and underdevelopment in the global South. Viewed through this comparative framing, RAMSI represented an antipodean version of the 'liberal peace' that had become the standard template for international interventions in world's troublespots with a common emphasis on restoring security, democratic state building and liberal economic reform (Allen & Dinnen 2010; Barbara 2008).

Concerns about the regional 'arc of instability' surrounding Australia's northern and eastern shores had been increasing since the late 1990s following political upheavals in Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Solomon Islands (Ayson 2005). Australia's former reliance on the soft power of aid and diplomacy had done little to stem problems of conflict and instability in its near neighbourhood. Canberra's 'new interventionism' also reflected the growing confidence acquired through Australian involvement in recent international peacekeeping and reconstruction engagements, including in East Timor and Bougainville. The progressive securitisation of development during the 1990s was dramatically accentuated following the 9-11 attacks against the United States in 2001 and the adoption of the 'war on terror' by Washington and its allies as a new strategic lens for viewing issues of international security. The spectre of 'state failure' was now viewed as the potential incubator for all manner of illicit and destabilising transnational threats, including organised crime and terrorism. For members of the 'coalition of the willing', including Australia, the security imperative for intervention was compelling.

Solomon Islands, which since 1998 had been wracked by a low intensity armed conflict referred to locally as the 'ethnic tension', was now being scrutinised through the lens of the 'war on terror', and its internal difficulties were recast as potential security threats for Australia and the larger region. The clearest application of this framing to Solomons was provided in a report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute published several weeks before the intervention. Identifying the country as the Pacific's first 'failing state', the report warned of dire security and humanitarian consequences if prompt and comprehensive remedial action was not taken (Wainwright 2003). In addition to robust measures to restore security, the report called for concerted efforts to 'build new political structures and security institutions and address underlying social and economic problems' (Wainwright 2003:39).

## 2.2. *Organisation and Evolution of the Mission*

The mission was mobilised under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum and, specifically, the Biketawa Declaration on Mutual Assistance of 2000, which authorised collective action in response to a security crisis in a member state. An Australian plan of intervention was endorsed by Forum Foreign Ministers, while the Solomon Islands Parliament enacted legislation setting out the powers and immunities of mission personnel, as well as prescribing annual reviews and reauthorisations of the intervention. Described by Alexander Downer as 'co-operative intervention', and with no specified end date, RAMSI was designed to operate through Solomon Islands national laws and government authorities.

Australia provided leadership as well as the bulk of mission's funding (recently estimated at $2.6 billion in real terms between 2003 and 2013), personnel and other resources. Smaller but significant contributions came from New Zealand and other forum member states. The wide-ranging mandate—subsequently organised around the three pillars of law and justice, the machinery of government and economic governance—combined security and development objectives:

- restoring civil order in Honiara and throughout the rest of the country;
- stabilising government finances;
- promoting long-term economic recovery and reviving business confidence; and
- rebuilding the machinery of government.

Restoring security was entrusted to the mission's police force, the Participating Police

Force (PPF), initially comprising around 330 police officers, with additional security and logistical support provided by approximately 1,800 military personnel. Civilian advisers, predominantly from a range of Australian government departments, were placed in various Solomon Islands's ministries and agencies.

The mission evolved considerably from 2003 to 2013 in terms of operational priorities, organisation and manner of engagement. The rapid and peaceful restoration of security was an impressive early accomplishment and, in many respects, constituted RAMSI's most tangible achievement. In addition to their executive policing role, the PPF also began the longer-term task of cleaning-up and re-building the Solomon Islands police. Other early achievements included restoring stability to government finances. Legislative and policy provisions were also enacted to support private sector investment, while measures were taken to strengthen Solomon Islands's accountability mechanisms, including the Office of the Auditor-General, the Ombudsman and the Leadership Code.

While the vast majority of Solomon Islanders remained supportive of RAMSIs presence throughout the decade-long mission, there have inevitably been criticisms and set-backs. Early concerns were prompted by the sheer scale of the mission and the potential marginalisation of local actors and their institutions in critical decision-making. Likewise, Australia's dominant role provoked criticism about the professed regional make-up of the mission.

Mission's early successes in combination with consistently high local expectations also contributed to a recurring criticism that RAMSI was disinterested in addressing the 'root causes' of the conflict. These were often talked about as a diverse range of outstanding issues encompassing the underlying ethnic tensions, the poor quality of successive governments, corruption, regional disparities in resources and income, land disputes, and longstanding dissatisfaction with the centralisation of political and economic power in Honiara and neglect of rural areas where most of the population lived.

While not insensitive to popular frustrations, RAMSI spokespersons regularly pointed out that many such issues lay beyond the mission's designated mandate.

Among the most serious set-backs were the unanticipated public disturbances in Honiara in April 2006 following national elections. Manasseh Sogavare's subsequent election as Prime Minister heralded a dramatic deterioration in bilateral relations between the Solomon Islands and Australian governments. A staunch critic of the mission at that time, Sogavare sought to re-assert his government's control and curb what he viewed as Australia's dominant influence. This, in turn, provoked strong resistance from political leaders in Canberra. Although these differences were fought out at the highest levels of the two governments and did not necessarily affect operational relationships, they highlighted continuing sensitivities among local political elites to perceived neo-colonial agendas on the part of external actors, especially Australia.

This difficult period in the bilateral relationship eventually passed following changes of government in each country in late 2007. Renewed efforts were made to create more space for Solomon Islander and regional voices to actively participate in the shaping and implementation of the mission. New consultative arrangements included a Forum Ministerial Standing Committee and a 'triumvirate group' comprising senior officials from the Solomon Islands government (SIG), Pacific Islands Forum and RAMSI. As well as responding to some of the critiques noted previously, especially in relation to the dominance of Australian technical advisers, these strengthened consultative arrangements were intended to increase SIG 'ownership' of RAMSI programs with a view to long-term drawdown. The earlier emphasis on law enforcement was also broadened through support to locally-led reconciliation processes, including the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2009 that was funded under Australia's bilateral aid program. There was also a lessening of the mission's initial reluctance to facilitate national dialogue around issues of political decentralisation.

## 3. How is Solomons Travelling?

While much was accomplished under RAMSI, many facets of the country's broader political and economic trends have been marked more by continuity than change over the mission's 10-year tenure. Thus, the notoriously unsustainable logging industry expanded, constituency development funds grew, the state continued to have a thin presence in rural areas, voting behaviour during elections continued to be parochial and parliamentary politics remained characterised by instability and money politics and, in the case of the April 2006 disturbances, violence. Moreover, the mission's almost exclusive focus on central government agencies in Honiara amounted to an important missed opportunity to re-establish critical linkages between the political and administrative centre and rural communities, and between formal and informal governance institutions and actors.

There have been no obvious signs of a re-emergence of ethnic militancy in the wake of RAMSI's drawdown. Indeed, violence in Solomon Islands is likely to remain localised and episodic for the foreseeable future, taking the form, for example, of urban disorder and acts of sabotage in relation to mining and logging operations. That said, a number of the key structural conditions that contributed to the tension remain extant and could provide the basis for a resumption of armed conflict in the medium to long term. Foremost, among these are country's youthful age profile and rapid population growth, the on-going dearth of formal employment opportunities, and the continued unevenness of economic development and government service delivery.

Moreover, potential triggers for conflict lie in the anticipated collapse of the logging industry, the impacts of a possible shift towards large-scale mining, and tensions associated with the continued growth and expansion of Honiara. In light of the proximity of Solomon Islands to Bougainville—and the contribution of the Bougainville crisis, by way of a 'demonstration effect', to the earlier ethnic tension—any resumption of armed conflict on Bougainville would pose a risk of potential contagion in Solomons. Even without a resumption of armed conflict in Bougainville, the porous nature of the border and the availability of guns in Bougainville and PNG provide a ready avenue for the acquisition of firearms by groups in Solomon Islands.

Solomon Islands continues to experience high population growth, with the most recent census (2009) recording a growth rate of 2.3 per cent. Moreover, the age structure of the population continues to be very young with 59 per cent under the age of 24 in the 2009 census. Although 82 per cent of the population resides in rural areas, the urban population is growing more quickly than the rural population: 4.8 per cent as opposed to 1.8 per cent during the last inter-census period. Honiara continues to be by-far the largest town, accounting for around 78 per cent of the total urban population, and its population has increased fivefold since independence in 1978.

Economic and social exclusion from urban land and housing markets has resulted in a rapid expansion of Honiara's informal settlements such that these now number 30, six of which have encroached onto areas of customary land beyond the town boundary (Foukona forthcoming). Ethnic identity narratives are salient in these settlements, each of which is based on provincial/island or sub-provincial/language affiliations. Indeed, Honiara is a crucible for ethnic tensions. In the decades prior to the outbreak of the tension, there had been two short-lived episodes of ethnic-based riots and unrest in Honiara. Moreover, there have been several episodes of rioting in Honiara in recent years, although these have not necessarily been ethnically motivated. The most serious was the riots that broke out following the national election in April 2006, which saw extensive damage and looting to the Chinatown district of Honiara. Other instances of 'mini-riots' have been linked to political machinations such as parliamentary votes of no confidence or public events such as soccer matches and music concerts.

In the peri-urban and rural areas to the east and west of Honiara, migrants, especially from Malaita, acquired access to land through marriage into local matrilineal landholding groups as well as through 'traditional' and market-based transactions, increasingly the latter. The

vast majority of these settlers were displaced during the ethnic tension and have, thus far, been reluctant to return. However, even without the presence of settlers from other ethnic groups, the land dealings that have occurred to date have deepened social fragmentation and inequality within local landowning groups, particularly along gender and intergenerational lines, rendering these areas sites of instability and insecurity (Allen 2013; Kabutaulaka 2001; Monson forthcoming).

Rural-based Solomon Islanders rely overwhelmingly on local community-based approaches for managing everyday disputes, especially approaches associated with traditional forms of leadership and the Christian churches. Indeed, kastom (crudely translated as 'customary') and church approaches are seen as entwined and complimentary. They share broadly common goals, including the restoration of social relationships affected by conflict. The preference for kastom and church approaches is partly due to problems of access to state policing and justice services, with the latter concentrated in Honiara and other urban centres. However, another reason is that the tension period inflicted considerable damage to the integrity and functioning of state agencies, especially the police. Public trust and confidence were eroded by the fracturing of the police and the participation of some of its elements in 'joint operations' with militants. While there have undoubtedly been some significant gains in police development, particularly in Honiara, rural Solomon Islanders continue to recount a litany of complaints against police, including allegations of nepotism or wantokism[3], lack of responsiveness to reported crimes and requests for assistance, and drunkenness and other forms of inappropriate behaviour (Allen et al. 2013, 51–9). The impartiality of the police is also raised in respect of disputes around resource development, especially logging.

These negative assessments need to be understood against a background of longstanding neglect of police and justice services by successive Solomon Islands's governments. In late 2013, there were only seven magistrates serving the entire country, and some remote communities had not been visited by a court circuit for 5 years or more. Moreover the local court system has become moribund in most areas. The parlous condition of the state justice sector is no accident. The character of the political settlement during the post-independence period has been inimitable to the consolidation of state authority, effective service delivery and sustainable development (Barbara 2014; Craig & Porter 2013). Elite politics have been conducted through patronage networks and the strategic redistribution of resources aimed at gaining or consolidating power. These dynamics have been institutionalised through ever-expanding discretionary funds and the corrosive nexus between politicians and the logging industry. Consistent with these 'rules of the game', leaders have demonstrated little interest in extending the capabilities or reach of law enforcement and judicial authorities. The main source of support for this sector has been international donors, with levels of assistance increasing exponentially under RAMSI.[4]

Set against the larger socio-economic changes underway, local approaches to dispute resolution and order maintenance have come under increasing stress in many areas. This growing fragility is borne out by a recent study of disputation and access to justice in rural communities (Allen et al. 2013), as well as by annual RAMSI-funded 'people's surveys' that indicate a steady decline in community perceptions of safety (ANU Enterprise 2013). The former study found that the presence of natural resource development, especially logging, was the most significant determinant of social cohesion in rural localities (Allen et al. 2013: xi). Local authority structures become deeply compromised when chiefs—the guardians of these

3. The term wantok (Solomon Islands's pijin) means one who speaks the same language (literally, 'one talk') but is commonly used more broadly and flexibly to describe relations of mutual obligation binding together near and distant kin, as well as those sharing other kinds of social and geographical ties.

4. Eighty-three per cent of Australian expenditure on RAMSI was spent on law and justice with most of that on policing (Hayward-Jones 2014: 3, 5). In 2011, RAMSI support amounted to around two-thirds of the total costs of policing in Solomon Islands (Gouy & Harding 2011).

structures—are seen as partisan players in such activities.

The very high economic growth rates of the RAMSI period are forecast to change dramatically with the anticipated decline of the logging industry owing to decades of unsustainable harvesting. The economic impacts will be felt both in terms of government revenue, 16 per cent of which comes from taxes on log exports alone, and jobs. As logging declines, there has been a surge in interest in mining. The Gold Ridge mine re-opened in 2010 (after having shut down during the tension) but closed again in April 2014 as a result of severe floods and subsequent 'security concerns' on the part of the Australian operator. There are two significant nickel tenements on other islands—one of which may come online as soon as 2016—and small-scale bauxite mining has recently commenced on Rennell. While economists are anticipating positive economic growth rates over 2015 and 2016, the medium term outlook remains 'uncertain'.

Given that the collapse of log exports as a consequence of the Asian financial crisis was one of the triggers for the violence that erupted in the late 1990s (Hameiri 2007), the anticipated collapse of the logging industry is a matter of concern. The political economy impacts of a shift to mining remain to be seen. However, based on the experience of Bougainville and other parts of Papua New Guinea, as well as with Gold Ridge, one could anticipate that benefit-sharing arrangements among the main stakeholders—landowners, provincial governments and SIG—will be the key potential source of tension. Regional experience demonstrates how large-scale mining projects can intensify patterns of socio-economic inequality within the islands that host them, contributing to perceptions of relative deprivation. They can also lead to conflicts within the landowning groups that host them, especially along intergenerational lines. Despite recent technical assistance from the World Bank, the weak domestic institutional and regulatory arrangements around mining, in concert with the parlous condition of state policing and judicial functions, mean that Solomon Islands is currently ill equipped to deal with the

socio-economic and political impacts of a potential mining boom.

## 4. Sustaining the Gains

We conclude by addressing the question of how the gains made by RAMSI might be sustained. This question is especially pertinent for the Australian Government given the substantial amount of money that it invested into the intervention. However, the development policy landscape in Australia has shifted quite significantly since the RAMSI transition commenced in 2013 with the integration of the Australian government's aid agency (AusAID) into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, a series of substantial cuts to the aid budget, and the announcement of new priorities for Australia's aid program. The question may, then, be recast as how the gains made by RAMSI, at a significant cost to the Australian taxpayer, might be sustained in the contemporary context of aid austerity and the new emphasis on economic growth for development.

A useful point of departure is Barbara's recent analysis of the RAMSI transition (2014). Invoking a spectrum that has partnership approaches at one end and interventionist state-building approaches at the other, he suggests that rather than having shifted entirely to a bilateral partnership paradigm, post-transition Australian assistance to Solomon Islands amounts to a 'hybrid approach incorporating partnership and interventionary modalities' (Barbara 2014:405). For Barbara, the transition has seen the continuation of RAMSIs 'co-production' role in two critical areas: as a de facto provider of security via an on-going police presence and as the provider of significant support to core areas of state functionality, primarily in the form of technical advisers.

While we would concur that critical areas of security and governance will need to be co-produced by Australia and other international partners for the foreseeable future (and that partnership approaches probably offer the best prospects of success in the education and health sectors), we ask what donors might hope to achieve beyond a sort of 'state-building life support'. In addressing this question, it is

useful to return to the distinction between state building and state formation. Scholars of historical comparative politics have long pointed to the critical role played by violent conflict in the emergence of legitimate and sustainable institutions and the 'long haul' of state formation (for example, Tilly 1992). In this vein, a prominent Bougainvillean ex-combatant once suggested that, unlike Bougainville, Solomon Islands had not experienced the depth and duration of violence from which enduring, legitimate institutions—and an inclusive and stable political settlement—could emerge.

The Bougainville case is important because it is widely cited in the growing literature on hybrid political orders (Boege et al. 2009) and has been described as a rare example of a successful 'local-liberal hybrid' approach to post-conflict state building (Wallis 2012). The prominent governance and peace-building role played by local non-state actors—especially chiefs—during the Bougainville crises, in conjunction with the 'light' touch of international actors during the peace process, saw the emergence of new hybrid institutions such as Councils of Elders and their incorporation into the governance structure of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (Dinnen & Peake 2013; Regan 2010). While acknowledging the important differences between the two contexts, including in relation to their respective histories of conflict and intervention, the Bougainville case prompts us to ask whether there is scope for donors to engage with hybrid governance approaches in post-RAMSI, particularly in rural areas.

While we suggest that there is considerable potential for such an approach, recent research on local level access to justice services in Solomon Islands (Allen et al. 2013) prompts us to flag a number of concerns with an 'instrumentalist hybridity' agenda (Dinnen & Allen forthcoming). This research demonstrates that contra the presumed privileging of local non-state institutions that runs through much of the scholarly literature on hybrid approaches to governance, rural Solomon Islanders are acutely aware of the growing frailties of their informal institutions and see a distinctive and singular role for actors and institutions that

are emancipated from society in a Weberian sense. This is evident in the expressed preference for RAMSI police (the PPF) over local police, in the desire for local non-state actors to be backed up by the authority of the state, in mimicry intended to attract external recognition and in widespread nostalgia for the colonial system of indirect rule that was seen to connect the legitimacy of local leaders with the functional authority of the colonial state. These sentiments must be interpreted in the context of the gradual withdrawal of the state during the postcolonial period, at least in terms of its law and justice and local governance functions.

These findings affirm the dangers of romanticising the local that have been well rehearsed in the critical literature on hybridity (for example Richmond 2011), and any donor agendas in relation to hybridity would have to be cognisant of the growing frailties of traditional institutions in parts of Solomon Islands. That said, the grassroots demand for greater engagement with Weberian institutions, albeit on local terms, suggests a potential alignment between local and supranational agendas, especially in relation to the governance of security. Indeed, they suggest a need for on-going co-production, particularly in the policing space, and the concomitant development of strong linkages between Weberian and local institutions.

A salient dimension of the nostalgia for indirect rule is the perception that it linked up local kastom leaders with the authority of the colonial state through intermediaries such as government-appointed headmen and, later, area constables. These sorts of intermediaries can play a critical role as translators between different social orders. While we are in no way advocating for a return to colonial forms of rule, interventions such as the nascent community officer project have the potential to speak to both contemporary community agendas for the state and the desire of Australia and its donor partners to maintain the costly gains made by RAMSI, not least of which is law and order. This short-lived project entailed lay persons being appointed in 23 rural locations to work with community leaders to resolve minor disputes and liaise with the external police regarding more serious matters

(Dinnen & Peake 2015). It has inspired two provinces to develop their own community governance and grievance management schemes that bring together community leadership, police and provincial authorities. These sorts of interventions also offer the potential to build locally appropriate and sustainable versions of the sorts of networked systems that increasingly characterise the governance of security in the post-industrial states of the global north (Dinnen & Allen 2013).

It is critical that potential donor support to a hybrid governance type approach does not become a foil for a neo-liberal small state agenda. Recall that the structural adjustment reform program of the late 1990s was a key trigger for the outbreak of the tension. The program saw the abolition of elected local governments, completing the withdrawal of the state from rural areas that had been taking place since independence. While an approach that develops linkages between state and kastom actors would be cost effective, it should not be seen as a means of replacing costly state institutions. Indeed, the on-going co-production of institutions such as the police would be essential to the long-term success of hybrid approaches.

We conclude with a brief reflection on political leadership, political economy and the prospects for the types of approaches that we have suggested gaining traction and local 'buy-in'. The prevailing political settlement in Solomon Islands is unlikely to see significant investment by political elites in either liberal or hybrid institutions of the sort we have discussed. That said, the evidence of widespread demand in rural areas for Weberian-like institutions, in concert with the continuing (although in some places increasingly tenuous) legitimacy of local non-state institutions, gives us confidence that the majority of Solomon Islands would endorse some sort of hybrid approach to governance, especially in the areas of policing and dispute resolution. It is worthwhile then, for external actors to continue to co-produce Weberian institutions while simultaneously supporting hybrid governance initiatives that are possible under Solomon's contemporary political economy, such as community officers. Greater effort could be made to align such initiatives with one of the core planks of the prevailing political settlement, constituency development funds. From such initiatives, and the 'grassroots' support that they are likely to attract, might emerge a more durable and inclusive political settlement and a political class that is more 'developmental'.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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