

The Changing Role of the Military in Papua New Guinea

R.J. May



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ABSTRACT

In the decade preceding Papua New Guinea's independence in 1975, there was a lively debate about the possible future role of the defence force. On the one hand there were many among Papua New Guinea's emerging nationalist elite who saw the defence force as a luxury and as a potential threat to an elected government. On the other hand there had already been created, under the Australian colonial administration, a well-trained Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF). In the event, the independent state of Papua New Guinea maintained the PNGDF in essentially the form in which it had been inherited from Australia. The constitution defined its primary role in terms of external defence and placed restrictions on its use for internal security purposes.

From the mid-1980s, however, the PNGDF came to play an increasingly active role in internal law and order operations and with the eruption in 1988-89 of an insurgency in the North Solomons Province (Bougainville) the PNGDF became involved, with the police, in a costly and controversial internal security operation. In 1991 changing perceptions of the role of the PNGDF were acknowledged in a redefinition of priorities, which recognised the greater significance of internal security relative to the unlikely threat of, and limited capacity to respond to, external aggression.

This monograph documents the changes which have taken place in the role of the military in Papua New Guinea and examines relations between civil and military authorities. It argues that a military coup remains a remote possibility. More likely is a gradual movement towards a significantly more *controlled* society, in which the PNGDF, though still subject to civilian control, will play an important role; in which the traditional distinction between police and army will become progressively less sharp; and in which the security forces will become increasingly politicised. Such tendencies are already in evidence.

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R.J. May

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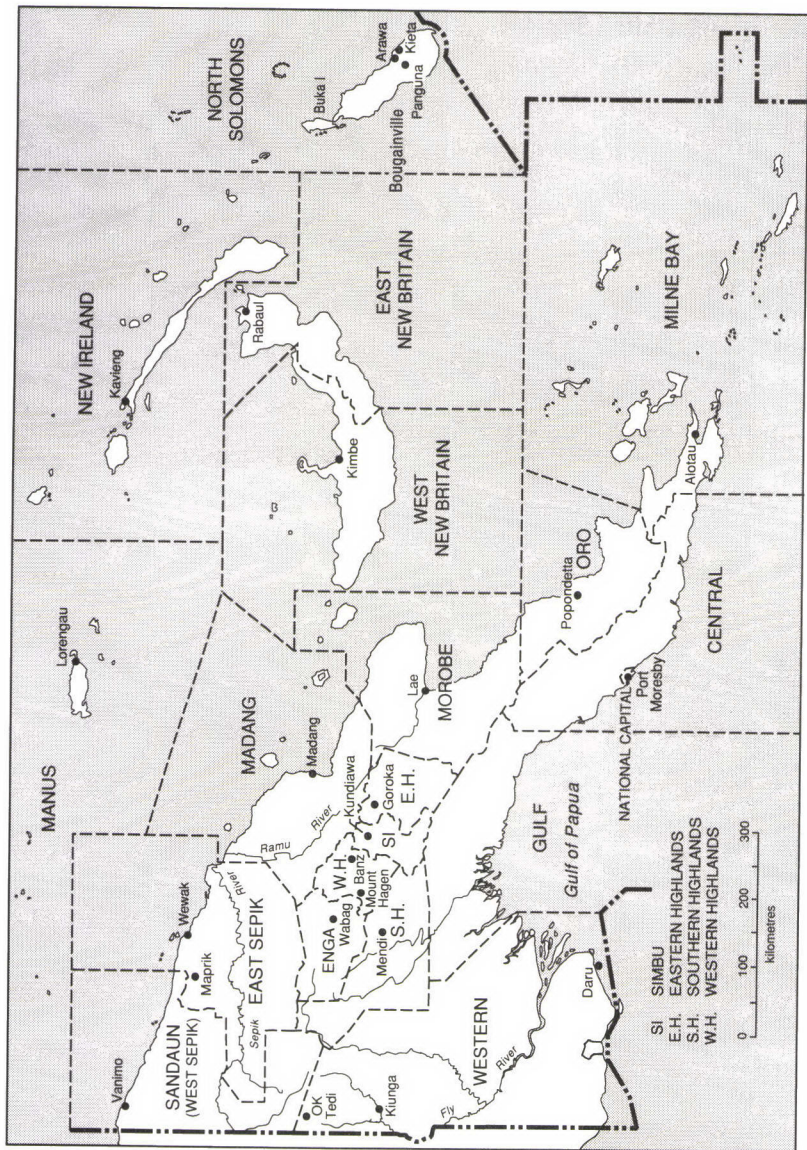
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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABRI	Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia - Indonesian Armed Forces
ADAG	Australian Defence Assistance Group
ALP	Australian Labor Party
BCL	Bougainville Copper Limited
BLF	Buka Liberation Front
BRA	Bougainville Revolutionary Army
CAP	Civic Action Programme
CIS	Corrective Institutions Service
CPC	Constitutional Planning Committee
DCP	Defence Cooperation Programme
DEO	District Engineer's Office
DIB	Defence Intelligence Branch
HMNZS	Her Majesty's New Zealand Ship
HQ	Headquarters
LOMET	Law and Order: Murder, Entry and Tribal Fighting
MCS	Military Cadet School
MST	Multinational Supervisory Team
NCO	Non-commissioned officer
NEC	National Executive Council
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIO	National Intelligence Organisation
NSC	National Service Corps
NSPG	North Solomons Provincial Government
NYS	National Youth Service
OCdt	Officer Cadet
OPM	Organisasi Papua Merdeka - Free Papua Movement
OR	Other ranks
PAP	People's Action Party
PIR	Pacific Islands Regiment
PNGDF	Papua New Guinea Defence Force
PPP	People's Progress Party
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RPIR	Royal Pacific Islands Regiment
RPNGC	Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary

UN
UPNG
US

United Nations
University of Papua New Guinea
United States



PAPUA NEW GUINEA - PROVINCES

PREFACE

In the decade preceding Papua New Guinea's independence in 1975, there was a lively debate about the possible future role of the defence force. On the one hand there were many among Papua New Guinea's emerging nationalist elite who saw the defence force as a luxury and as a potential threat to an elected government. On the other hand there had already been created, under the Australian colonial administration, a well-trained Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF), and with the promise of continued military assistance from Australia there was a strong inclination to maintain the force, as a first recourse against external aggression and with the possibility of its being used to assist civilian authorities in the maintenance of public order and security and in the promotion of national development. In the event, the independent state of Papua New Guinea maintained the PNGDF in essentially the form in which it had been inherited from Australia. The constitution defined its primary role in terms of external defence and placed restrictions on its use for internal security purposes.

In the early post-independence years the PNGDF maintained a fairly low profile and concerns about the possibility of military intervention in politics subsided. From the mid-1980s, however, the PNGDF came to play an increasingly active role in internal law and order operations and with the eruption in 1988-89 of an insurgency situation in the North Solomons Province (Bougainville) the PNGDF became involved, with the police, in a costly, controversial and to date largely unsuccessful large-scale internal security operation. In 1991 changing perceptions of the role of the PNGDF were acknowledged in a redefinition of priorities, which recognised the greater significance of internal security relative to the unlikely threat of, and limited capacity to respond to, external aggression.

From time to time, especially on several occasions when relations between PNGDF personnel and civilian authorities have been tense, questions have been raised concerning the extent of civilian control over the military and the possibility of a military coup. In my opinion military intervention remains a remote possibility; nevertheless internal security problems in Papua New Guinea over recent years have brought about significant changes in the role of the military and its relations with government, and though Papua New

Guinea remains one of the more robust democracies in the region, the relationship of the military to civil government in the 1990s bears re-examination.

CHAPTER 1

THE COLONIAL HERITAGE

The origins of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force may be traced back to a Papuan Infantry Battalion formed in Port Moresby on the eve of the Pacific War, in 1940.¹ Subsequently a further three New Guinea Infantry Battalions were formed in New Guinea, and a headquarters Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR) was formed in Port Moresby to administer all four battalions. All commissioned officers and most non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were Australian. The PIR fought with distinction alongside Allied troops in Papua New Guinea but was disbanded in 1946.²

In 1951 the PIR³ was re-formed; a battalion was recruited from Port Moresby in 1951-52 and outstations established at Vanimo, on the north coast near what was then the Dutch (now Indonesian) border, and on Manus in the New Guinea islands. (The latter was shifted to Wewak, on the north coast, in 1962.) The New Guinea Voluntary Rifles was also re-formed in 1951 as a reserve force (part of the Australian Army's Citizen Military Forces), becoming a multiracial unit in 1965 and being absorbed within the PIR eight years later.

1 An all-white New Guinea Volunteer Rifles had been authorised by the Australian administration in New Guinea in September 1939. This consisted of small scattered units, which were employed in scouting and guerilla activities before being disbanded in 1942.

2 For a detailed history of the PIR, and its involvement in World War II, see D. Barrett, 'The Pacific Islands Regiment' in K.S. Inglis (ed.), *The History of Melanesia* (The University of Papua and New Guinea and the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, 1969), pp.493-502; N.E.W. Granter (ed.), *Yesterday and Today: An Illustrated History of the Pacific Islands Regiment from its Formation on 19 June 1940 until the Present Day* (South Pacific Post, Port Moresby, 1970); P. Mench, *The Role of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force* (Development Studies Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, 1975); H. Nelson, 'Hold the Good Name of the Soldier: The Discipline of Papuan and New Guinean Infantry Battalions, 1940-1946', *Journal of Pacific History*, Vol.15, No.4, 1980; J. Sinclair, *To Find a Path: The Life and Times of the Royal Pacific Islands Regiment*. Volume I, *Yesterday's Heroes 1885-1950* (Boolarong Publications, Brisbane, 1990); and J. Sinclair, *To Find a Path: The Papua New Guinea Defence Force and the Australians to Independence*. Volume II, *Keeping the Peace 1950-1975* (Crawford House Press, Bathurst, 1992).

3 The PIR became the Royal Pacific Islands Regiment (RPIR) in 1984.