5. Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands

In September 2002, Prime Minister Kemakeza made two requests from his embattled and unpopular government to the United Nations for international assistance to stop the violence that persisted. The United Nations sent an inter-agency mission to investigate (Ponzio 2005:176), but by early 2003 it was clear that a consequence of the Solomons’ diplomatic recognition of Taiwan would be that China would veto any Security Council resolution to step up assistance. Australia had not invited the United Nations to participate in the Townsville peace talks. At every stage from then on, the United Nations played a more marginal role than is normally the case with an international peace operation—even the previous regional one in Bougainville. Nevertheless, particularly the UNDP, but also UNICEF and a number of other UN agencies played important roles in post-conflict development and support for reconciliation.

Australia had declined multiple invitations to support international peacekeeping since 1998 to restore order in the Solomons. The 11 September 2001 attacks in New York, the 2002 Bali bombing and the ‘war on terror’ began to change Prime Minister Howard’s thinking towards his region. He decided to become more activist in stabilising the ‘arc of instability’ around Australia and drew praise from the US Bush administration for this proactive approach. This new Australian interventionism was a sudden shift ‘from a particularist and developmental lens to a global and security lens in viewing Pacific developments’ (Fry and Kabutaulaka 2008:16). The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) (Wainwright 2003:28) produced an influential paper that suggested Solomon Islands was at greatest risk of state failure in the region and was a potential haven for terrorist groups. The paper contained ‘five references to possible terrorism and twelve references to a “failed state”’ (Anderson 2008:6). Among other things, the ASPI paper set the initial tone for a ‘muscular’ law-enforcement approach to peacebuilding in Solomon Islands that was not even a Western community policing approach, let alone the more devolved kiap model of government by patrol that combined policing with other government functions (Gordon 1983), which once worked well in Melanesia, delivering a more dispersed community policing presence into rural areas than occurs today (Dinnen and Braithwaite 2009):

The central requirement is for active, sustained and muscular policing. The force that undertakes the task will need to be well resourced and
effectively led. It will need to impose a policy of zero tolerance for violence and intimidation, and be prepared to use significant force, including lethal force, to do so. (Wainwright 2003:41)

Some 6300 Solomon Islanders were arrested, many on multiple charges, in the first three years of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). This was way more than 1 per cent of the population, and a much greater percentage of the population in Honiara, where the arrests were concentrated (Carroll and Hameiri 2007:421). There were many cases of defendants spending two, three or more than four years in prison on remand then being acquitted (Averre 2008:2).¹ Some RAMSI officers we interviewed saw it as a de facto policy in the early years of the intervention to charge leading militants with something reasonably plausible to get them locked up on remand while they more carefully sought to build evidence against them. When Prime Minister Howard announced the intervention, he referred to the risk of the Solomons becoming a safe haven for ‘transnational criminals and even terrorists’. It seemed implausible to people who knew the Solomons well that it could be a hospitable safe haven for transnational criminals or terrorists. Howard dismissed in his interview with us any influence of ‘war on terror’ thinking in his actual decision to go in. He believed RAMSI was politically popular with the Australian people and his media people did promote the terror angle at times in seeking to generate interest in the electorate. Many who supported the intervention as a good thing for the people of the Solomons went along with a story that also allowed Howard to impress members of the Bush administration—for example, Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, with how he was cleaning up his regional badlands.

Our interview with then Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, who had launched the ASPI report, suggested that the sharp policy reversal to intervene with international peacekeepers in the Solomons—against the advice of his department and the Australian Public Service more widely—was a result of his conversation with Prime Minister Howard about Prime Minister Kemakeza’s request for help. This conversation revealed that Howard’s thinking was similar to Downer’s. They decided to go in with a spirit of statebuilding until the job was done, without any exit timetable. Our interview notes say

¹ In 2006, Solomon Islands boasted the second-highest remand population, as a proportion of the total prison population, in the Pacific region (International Centre for Prison Studies, cited in Averre 2006). Just less than 50 per cent of prisoners were on remand—second only to Timor-Leste, where 70 per cent of prisoners were on remand. According to the then Public Solicitor, Ken Averre, writing in 2006 (p. 16): ‘The number of cases in the criminal justice system is without parallel and the infrastructure and personnel are simply not there to deal with it.’ In relation to the length of pre-trial detention, the US-based Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, in its annual Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Solomon Islands (published in March 2006), reported lengthy pre-trial detention as a ‘human rights problem’ and explicitly linked this state of affairs with the large number of arrests made by RAMSI (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2006).
that his department’s view was that ‘you would have to completely redesign the place’ to be effective and, because that would be very expensive and take a long time, it was unwise. Downer took this seriously, but concluded ‘let’s do that then even if it takes more than a decade. Howard agreed [according to Downer] “Let’s reengineer it”.’ Howard told Kemakeza that the intervention would be ‘all or nothing’; his government would have to agree to in-line expatriate personnel in the police and the Finance Ministry with full access to all financial records.

The New Zealand Foreign Minister, Phil Goff, likewise convinced his prime minister and cabinet to support what became RAMSI. Goff, like Downer, had ‘nightmares of a Pacific version of Rwanda on their doorstep’ (Moore 2004:206). The support of the Pacific Islands Forum and bipartisan support from the Solomon Islands Parliament were conditions of the intervention. These were unanimously delivered in July 2003. Some 1700 of the 2200 RAMSI personnel who landed in July 2003 were Australian, but there were small contingents from all 10 Pacific Island Forum states. Prime Minister Kemakeza announced a new, 21-day amnesty for handing in guns (31 July 2003 to 21 August 2003), after which 10-year prison sentences would be imposed on militants with weapons. Firearms flooded in immediately; 2500 weapons that included large numbers of high-powered weapons and light machine guns and 300 000 rounds of ammunition were surrendered. This allowed RAMSI to proliferate public spectacles of weapons destruction soon after they landed. After RAMSI had been in place for a year, this had risen to 3713 weapons—about 700 of them high-powered—which, when combined with the earlier surrenders, suggests a higher level of armament of militants than was the case in Bougainville. At least 300 of the weapons stolen from police armouries were never returned; how many were sold and exported and how many were buried are not known. RAMSI intelligence fears many are buried and pose a future threat.

The capture of Harold Keke

The size of the intervention was much more than was needed. RAMSI Special Coordinator Nick Warner has said this was an explicit policy of ‘shock and awe’. It was a language of intervention that would impress Condoleezza Rice as much as Melanesian militants at a time when Australia was planning withdrawal of the troops it had committed to the initial invasion of Iraq. The landing on Guadalcanal under the gaze of the regional and international media was transacted with spectacle—helicopters dropping troops in visible locations, landing barges crashing onto the beach loaded with troops when the landing could have been more efficiently transacted at the wharf, and so on. It worked in immediately transforming the climate of security, so much so that one senior PNG military officer who was there felt their job would have been easier had
something similar been done on Malaita at the same time as the Honiara landing. At the least, he thinks the navy vessels should have sailed around Malaita first with helicopters buzzing off them onto the island.²

Figure 5.1 RAMSI soldiers and a Solomon Islands police officer exchange information as they patrol their different ways in the Central Market in Honiara

Photo: Courtesy of Defence Magazine

RAMSI replaced the rule of the gun with the rule of law very quickly. Immediately, there was a new feeling that ‘you could be arrested again when you broke the law. Chiefs would not talk to boys [during the Tension]. They were afraid to open their mouths. It was rule of the gun. RAMSI’s arrival gave chiefs and elders courage to speak up’ (Malaitan premier).

It can be argued that most of the best work of RAMSI was done as an announcement effect even before it landed. Most of the weapons that were handed in were deposited with the National Peace Council before RAMSI arrived. There were cases of stolen cars returned furtively to their owners’ driveways before the RAMSI landing. The corrupt Snyder Rini was removed as Minister for Finance and eight departmental heads were sacked in early August before the in-line finance staff from the treasuries and finance departments of Australia and New Zealand followed in the wake of the peacekeepers. Rini, who became finance minister again in Prime Minister Sikua’s government from 2007,

² Malaita is the province where support for a continued presence of RAMSI was lowest in 2008—76 per cent (McMurray 2008:58).
and many of these officers, were to make a comeback within a few years. All warlords, including Harold Keke, made up their minds that they would urge their fighters to surrender their weapons and renounce violence before RAMSI landed. One Member of Parliament, Yokio Sato, and a former member, Kamilo Teke, had been gradually persuading Keke to the point where he was willing to surrender (Kenilorea and Moore 2008:427). We have seen that Keke was the key spoiler who instilled fear and fomented a security dilemma well beyond his base on the Weather Coast. His holding out was the main justification provided by ex-MEF for retaining their weapons.

RAMSI’s first priority was to disarm and arrest Keke. RAMSI police commander Ben McDevitt wrote to Keke on 25 July 2003 offering to guarantee Keke’s safety in custody in return for surrendering weapons and submitting to justice. Keke replied in writing that he wanted peace and was willing to surrender ‘as long as the first priority is to disarm the militants in Honiara and get rid of corrupt politicians’ (Fraenkel 2004a:168). Keke’s Guadalcanal Liberation Front had declared a unilateral cease-fire three weeks before McDevitt’s letter, on 5 July 2003 (Plunkett 2003:12). A no-nonsense message was sent in a letter to all militants from Warner and McDevitt:

In our talks with militia leaders, we have made it very clear that we are not here to negotiate or make deals...It is in your interest to hand in all guns. Anyone found with a gun after midnight 21 August will be breaking the law and will face up to 10 years in prison and a S$25,000 fine...We are able to deal with any situation and track down illegal weapons. We will not be stopped by threats or intimidation. (Fraenkel 2004a:168)

As in Bougainville, in Solomon Islands, the rumour was spread that RAMSI had technology that could see buried guns from the air. While our interviews with the key players make it very clear that McDevitt and Warner were not bluffing, had Keke decided to hide out in his remote Weather Coast, it would have been extremely difficult to capture him and likely that he would have killed many of those pursuing him into the mountains before they killed him. Moreover, he was a mentally unstable man who had convinced others of his mystical indestructibility. So he could well have also persuaded himself of that fiction. There was a fear that Keke was beyond being appealed to in terms of either his grievances or his greed.

In regards to the activities of Harold Keke and his men on the Weather Coast, transcripts, judgements and other documents associated with the Tension Trials paint a picture of unbridled criminality: extortion,
theft, kidnapping, arson, torture and murder. Keke’s reign of terror was characterised by a dark, grim, and self-serving dynamic of criminal gratification, bordering on criminal insanity, which clearly had little, if nothing, to do with the causes which he and some of his men claimed to be fighting for. (Allen 2007:131)

Keke was initially charged only with skipping bail in March 1999 and believed he was returning to a hearing in Honiara that would give him an opportunity to address the people on the bona fide grievances of the people of Guadalcanal. To some extent, he did that in the trial in which he was convicted of the murder of cabinet minister Father Geve.

Figure 5.2 RAMSI leaders Ben McDevitt (right foreground) and Nick Warner negotiate the surrender of Harold Keke (left) in 2003 at a meeting in which he admits to murdering six Melanesian Brothers

Photo: AAP/AFP

By Christmas of the year of the landing most of the militant leaders were under arrest, including Joe Sangu, Harold Keke, Stanley ‘Satan’ Kaoni and Andrew Te’e on the IFM side and Jimmy Rasta Lusibaea on the MEF side as well as all the leaders of the Joint Operation within the police. At the time Moore (2004:18) was writing, he was able to say ‘the entire supreme council of the MEF is now in prison or facing charges’. By May 2006, it was reported that a remarkable

3 And one might add rape and sexual assault, which were frequently reported on both sides. Peochakuri village on the Weather Coast has reported that 15 per cent of its women and girls were raped by ex-militants that included Harold Keke (Allen 2007:248).
160 former police officers had been arrested (Butler 2006:4) and ultimately more than 400 lost their jobs. Notwithstanding the amnesty signed at Townsville, in its first two years, RAMSI made 611 arrests on ‘very serious charges’; these seemed mostly to comply with the letter of the poorly drafted Amnesty Acts of 2000 and 2001, but often not their spirit. Total RAMSI arrests even by 1 November 2003 had reached 1340, including 25 police officers.

In mid-2006, Allen (2007:38) concluded that on the Guadalcanal side alone, there were 47 Guadalcanal ex-militants still in custody at Rove prison. Only one cabinet minister was put behind bars in 2003: Daniel Fa’afunua was arrested for assaulting his wife and then assaulting the New Zealand policewoman who responded to the complaint. The next year (2004), MEF leader, Minister for Agriculture and Livestock and former foreign minister, Alex Bartlett, was imprisoned for demanding money with menace and other offences in 2000.

Fortunately, the overloaded Honiara courts were among the more resilient institutions in Solomon Islands, though it became necessary for RAMSI to invest heavily in expatriate lawyers and court administration reform. What was true of the Honiara courts was not true of the rest of the country; the working of local magistrate’s courts had completely broken down by 2009 when 80 per cent of cases sent to a magistrate for a hearing were not happening.4 While it is reported that there have been only 55 Tension trials (some with multiple defendants) (Parliamentary Inquiry 2009:135), actually many militant leaders were imprisoned on charges other than Tension killings, including domestic violence, robbery, extortion with threats, corruption and embezzlement. Andrew Nori was never put behind bars—nor were Kemakeza or Rini, among other leaders, to face corruption or embezzlement charges while they remained in power. Kemakeza was charged after he left office in 2006 and ultimately imprisoned. There seems to have been a conscious RAMSI decision to delay his arrest while he was prime minister in the interests of political stability, according to statements by a former Solomon Islands director of public prosecutions (Dinnen 2007b). Without RAMSI, Kemakeza would not have survived as long as he did; without Kemakeza fearing for his life as well as his political future, RAMSI would never have been welcomed in and given the free hand to run the show (in a way Kemakeza’s successors were unwilling to allow).

The effect was a pact for three years with ‘a grand council of thieves’ (Plunkett 2003:37). It was not a totally unprincipled engagement with Kemakeza; it delivered peace and stability, and ultimately RAMSI turned on the kleptocrats. Another former prime minister, Alebua, was also imprisoned for corruption

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4 In a 2006 interview, one leading Western Province business leader said in an interview in Gizo that ‘RAMSI is not here to police, just here to arrest’. He went on to say that convictions rarely resulted from the arrests.
concerning compensation payments. Until these convictions occurred, there was a widespread feeling among ordinary Solomon Islanders that RAMSI was letting the ‘big fish’ swim away with their ill-gotten gains.

**Cleaning up the finances**

Treasury and finance department officers from Australia and New Zealand who moved into hands-on roles in the Ministry of Finance transformed the fiscal situation within months of RAMSI arriving.\(^5\) Taxation revenue collected in December 2003 was 40 per cent higher than for the previous highest month of the year and total revenue collections (including customs) for the whole of 2003 doubled 2002 collections, while 2004 revenue collections were treble those of 2002 (Batten and Chand 2008:130). The revenue continued to rise sharply up to and including 2008, until the global financial crisis belatedly hit in 2009. In 2009, senior tax and customs officers said that trust in the tax system had increased. Voluntary compliance was up because people no longer felt that tax they paid would be stolen by militants and crooked politicians.

The fiscal recklessness of the past continues to place a heavy burden on the present, with the Honiara Club Agreement requiring the Solomon Islands Government to devote 10 per cent of all revenue to debt repayment and to take no new loans. By 2006, debt fell to 100 per cent of GDP and to 53 per cent by 2008 (Parliamentary Inquiry 2009:144–5).

Replacing the paper customs system with a computerised one made some kinds of corruption more difficult: the electronic architecture makes it impossible for most officers to make changes within certain fields; it leaves a trace of the identity of an officer who changes a number; and it forces non-compliance into areas where it is easier for an audit to pick up. Customs revenue has not accelerated nearly as rapidly as tax because top-down assaults on the revenue from the Minister for Finance are still possible (see also Allen forthcoming). Against advice on prevailing international market prices for logs, ministers for finance have repeatedly issued instructions to customs to reduce the valuation of logs below these prices. Ministerial tax exemptions have been repeatedly given to multinational loggers. For the most part, more sophisticated transfer pricing is hardly needed. The *Customs Act* penalty as of 2009 for failing to report the export of logs is $S200—about US$30. Allen (forthcoming) shows that simple capacity constraints on getting out to inspect logs to check physical correspondence with declaration are also a big part of the problem. With

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\(^5\) In fact, tax administration capacity building has for some time been transferred from RAMSI to a five-year bilateral NZAID program in which seconded New Zealand tax officials have been doing a magnificent job of enhancing capacity.
logging a domain beyond the rule of law, other crime has flourished under the wing of protected loggers. Sexual abuse of indigenous children by Asian logging contractors has been widespread (Herbert 2007). In three interviews with senior RAMSI personnel, it was alleged that guns have been shipped in and out on logging vessels that enjoy political protection.

At the big end of town, the largest income earners in the economy also pay almost no tax. In the five years to 2009, a total of only S$5 million in tax was collected from the multinational logging companies (Inland Revenue interview). This is one of many less important aspects of the tax system where non-compliance is almost universal. These challenges of turning around the compliance culture can be tackled one at a time over a period of years and basically this is happening in Solomon Islands thanks to a productive partnership between indigenous and in-line expatriate revenue officials.

The rhetoric of partnership and capacity building was strong in RAMSI. Often it was not matched by the reality of in-line officers, who quickly found capacity building frustrating and found it easier to ‘do it yourself’ and ‘get on with the job’.

In the early years the government almost stood back and wanted RAMSI to do things. It has been difficult to pull back from this. RAMSI’s instincts had become that if someone was going to get something done, we would be the ones to get it done. (RAMSI officer from AusAID, 2009)

It is a familiar dilemma that international interventions instead of building local capacity actually ‘suck it out’, as Michael Ignatieff (2003:162) puts it, by marginalising indigenous actors in their haste to get things done. Fraenkel (2004a:173) reports that feathers were ruffled early by a notorious sign on a toilet door in the Finance Ministry: ‘RAMSI Personnel Only.’ The Economic Reform Unit remained in 2009 an office that was a sea of expatriate faces. The confidence to hand over the reins was still wanting after six years. One minister was scathing:

They are kids.⁶ There’s too many of them. They turn over too fast. Some only come for three months. Their minister does not know what they are doing, does not know the name of many of them. They are very weak on the training of local staff and all these years on there are only three of them. They don’t understand the conditions of the country in

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⁶ While many advisors are young and it can be a problem—for example, with a young police officer of limited experience in Australia telling an experienced indigenous police officer how to police his own society (McLeod 2009)—many police advisors, like advisors in all pillars, were over-fifty-fives seeking a new challenge.
which they are working…the Australian Treasury is using the Economic Reform Unit in the Solomon Islands as a training ground for its new graduates. (2009 interview)

One expatriate in that ministry put it this way: ‘The Solomons suffers from lack of basic administrative capacity. How to fill out a form to release funds…We were policy people and we were not used to capacity building and management. We found these things tiresome to be honest.’

**Little recovery in micro-finance**

The Solomon Islands Credit Union League received considerable donor assistance in the 1990s and much collegial support and capacity building from Australian credit unions. Most were located on Guadalcanal and these were all looted by militants during the conflict. Most were emptied out then burnt to the ground. The treasurer of the largest one was killed. As of late 2003, only 20 of 164 credit unions formerly operating in the country were still open (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2004:82).

Post-conflict in Solomon Islands, as in Bougainville, the nation was awash with pyramid schemes that promised fast money and demolished many families’ savings (Kabutaulaka 2004:395). One of them was Noah Musingku’s Bougainvillean ‘bank’ that signed a memorandum of understanding with the Solomon Islands Cabinet in 2003 to lend it US$2.6 billion! Sadly, in the early years of this decade, more Solomon Islanders were ‘saving’ with the pyramid schemes than with members of the Solomon Islands Credit Union League. It says something about the relentless focus of RAMSI on statebuilding that rebuilding micro-finance in civil society was not a priority. In fact, it was a higher priority for Australian development assistance pre-conflict than post-conflict!

**Police building**

One factor that has made peacebuilding in Solomon Islands easier than in Bougainville, Timor-Leste and various Indonesian conflicts such as Aceh and Papua is that Solomon Islands does not have a military. So, unlike these other conflicts of the region, at least the problems to be managed did not include

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7 Concerns surrounding capacity building and counterparting in the Ministry of Finance were highlighted in a Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat social impact assessment conducted in October 2003: ‘A repeating concern has been raised about the effectiveness of current counterparting arrangements between RAMSI personnel and local DOF [Department of Finance] staff. Local staff members feel excluded and RAMSI personnel are not coaching/mentoring or transferring skills to national counterparts’ (Pacific Islands Forum 2004:19).
elements of the military and the police shooting at each other. At the same time, the Solomons case shows that the absence of a military is no guarantee against a coup in which the best-armed organisations in the society participate—the police in the case of the Solomons, more specifically the Police Field Force (paramilitary border police).

Our interviews with police revealed that divisions within the police between those who participated in the coup and those who did not were still a huge problem. The Melanesian Brothers conducted a reconciliation service within the police in April 2002 (Moore 2004:217). Yet our interviews revealed that this was seen as a rather set-piece reconciliation, albeit with some emotion, tears and hugging, that touched the hearts of only some police. The reconciliations within the Bougainville police between factions who fought on different sides in their war secured a much more meaningful, deeper unification of the Bougainville police service. The Solomon Islands Police Force was purged of most of the Malaitans who played important roles in joining forces with the MEF. The resentments of expelled police are still carried in important ways by their wantoks still in the police. Police who refused to participate in the 2000 coup reported to us resentment at being disciplined or ordered around by more senior police who did participate (and who remain in the police today). ‘Who are you to talk about discipline?’ was the spirit of this feeling.

As has happened in the Ministry of Finance, in the early years of RAMSI’s Participating Police Force (PPF), there was a major problem in the quality of the capacity building of foreign police who might have been well trained as police officers, but not as trainers. The logic of flawed capacity building in this regard could be inexorable. The PPF arrive at a police post in an area that has been racked by ethnic conflict to work with the Solomon Islands Police Force. For a variety of reasons, which include the good work the PPF does at community policing during their patrols, their arrival is associated both as a matter of fact and in the minds of locals with a dramatic improvement in security. Solomon Islanders heap praise on the PPF for this accomplishment much more than they do on the Solomon Islands police who patrol with the PPF (because local police are still tainted with blame for the violence and chaos of the Tension). It was only human that the PPF and their leaders accepted these accolades. And it is to the credit of their leaders that they eventually realised it was a mistake that the PPF used its superior public relations machine (compared with that of the local police) to take credit for things that should have been shared or even fully attributed to the Solomon Islands Police Force. The PPF realised that in the long run, RAMSI disappears and becomes irrelevant, while confidence in the local police will persist as a foundation that matters for future security. So the PPF became better at giving credit to Solomon Islanders when things were done well.
The second part of the inexorable logic of flawed capacity building arises from the following trap that foreign police advisors who are not experienced trainers fall into. They see a mistake that their local police partner makes because they have never been trained not to make it. The RAMSI officer explains the mistake and shows how to respond to or record an incident in the right way. Weeks later, the same situation arises and the same mistake is made. The RAMSI officer patiently explains again the right way to do it and why it is important to do it this way. On the third occasion when the mistake is made, the RAMSI officer simply takes over the handling and recording of the incident, telling themselves that it is ’easier to just do it myself’, especially when the improved police efficiency is being appreciated by the community. But then when RAMSI withdraws and hands back all the policing to local officers, these officers have not learnt to implement the superior policing method.

This difficulty is compounded by the fact that in the case of RAMSI—as is generally the case with police building—the 330 foreign police initially assumed primarily operational roles to secure previously unsafe streets backed up by military peacekeepers. Police whom we interviewed emphasised that while they did most of the front-line work in the early days of RAMSI, militants feared and respected the khaki uniforms and ‘long guns’ of the military more than they did the blue uniforms of the police. An irony of community policing also
arose because the PPF mostly patrolled in cars (especially after the murder of Australian Constable Dunning on 22 December 2004). The RAMSI military was more popular with locals than its police ‘because they walk the streets and talk to people. The PPF, on the other hand, are rarely seen outside of their ubiquitous police vehicles’ (Allen 2006:197).

Figure 5.4 RAMSI military captures the attention of two young Solomon Islanders

Photo: AAP/Lloyd Jones

RAMSI police gradually pulled back from operational roles to capacity building (Goldsmith and Dinnen 2007)—a shift that can be hard for police whose only past experience has been operational. Moreover, the PPF continued to do the highest-profile operational work, such as major investigations, intelligence and controlling major outbreaks of disorder, and this was naturally the work foreign police sought to do as opposed to the less glamorous grind of capacity building in routine policing. There was also a more general problem of trust in the Solomon Islands police on the part of RAMSI. They were viewed as a broken and corrupted force that had contributed greatly to the Solomons conflict. Given that background, many in the PPF regarded local police who were not new recruits as potential suspects. This was not a great basis for effective capacity-development work.

A more fundamental problem continues to be the trust and confidence of the Solomons people in their police. People often prefer going to RAMSI police with their problems than to the Solomon Islands police and often complain that the latter act to enforce the law only when the RAMSI police are present (Parliamentary Inquiry 2009:172–3).
Lessons for the police from the 2006 riots

The worst moment in the history of the PPF was the riots of April 2006 that destroyed most of Chinatown in the capital and injured 36 Australian police, one very seriously. It is hard to judge whether the riots are better viewed as mostly spontaneous or as highly organised. Violence was fomented by criminal elements, among others (Commission of Inquiry 2009), who were likely organised by political opponents of the Rini government, which most people felt they had voted against. These riot organisers set out to ‘cause such trouble so as to force a regime-change’ (Commission of Inquiry 2009:47). This regime change was indeed accomplished by the rule of the mob. Police alleged that a named Member of Parliament made a statement in mid-2006 to the effect that ‘if anything goes wrong, proceed with lawlessness’ (Commission of Inquiry 2007:11). While there was an element of manipulation on the part of certain leaders, there was also a lot of spontaneity and opportunism in the riots and quite a bit of anti-RAMSI sentiment (Allen 2008, 2009b). There had been riots in Honiara before and they all followed the same broad pattern and had usually been responded to effectively by police. Viewing the April 2006 riots as manipulated by shadowy masterminds helped to cover for the mis-judgments and total lack of preparation on the part of the PPF.

The looting and burning of shops in Chinatown after a demonstration of some kind, is a known scenario. It has been attempted on many occasions in the past and, each time, successfully blocked by Solomon Islands disciplinary forces. (Former Royal Solomon Islands Police Assistant Commissioner Mike Wheatley, Solomon Star, 26 May 2006:2)

There was clearly an intelligence failure by both the PPF and the Solomon Islands Police Force. Many in the latter organisation are believed to have had wind of the impending riots, but passed this intelligence neither to RAMSI nor to their own leadership. The intelligence function was no longer working communicatively within the Solomon Islands Police Force. This relates to a larger dilemma inherent in post-conflict police-building missions. In clearing out the ‘bad apples’, the interveners necessarily hollow out the institution, reducing its capacity in the short term in order to build it in the longer term. This was the point reached in 2006 with a Solomon Islands police force that had limited capacity of its own, including intelligence capacity. Allen (2006:199) connects the surprising failure of the PPF to hear of plans for a possible riot to an architecture of their presence that locked the PPF away in remote, airconditioned bases and patrol cars, rotations that were too short to build relationships and limited efforts to learn Pidgin. Terrorist-style arrest and search tactics directed at the most
disaffected families and communities—the communities where the relevant intelligence was to be found—had also put up barriers to sharing secrets with the PPF (Allen 2006:199).

While the evidence of organisation for rioting was strong, as Christopher Waiwori (2006:7) pointed out, the politically driven organisers of the 2006 riots were a small group in comparison with the much larger crowd of looters who ‘took advantage of the unstable security situation...to help themselves to anything they want’. Emulatory rioting broke out in Auki, the provincial capital of Malaita, soon after the Honiara riots. These were totally managed by the Solomon Islands Police Force and were much more successfully and quickly contained than was the case in Honiara, albeit in an unconventional way! Supporters of the police (who became a larger group than the rioters) began pelting rocks at the rioters, who were pelting rocks at the police. The counter-rioters were not discouraged by the police and prevailed in supporting the police to drive the rioters away from Chinese stores they were planning to loot! We were able to attend the trials of some of the ringleaders of the Auki riots in the local open-sided magistrate’s court in 2006. It was an impressive example of community justice; about 100 people watched (a contrast with the tiny attendance at the Tension trials we frequented in Honiara). Offenders apologised for their wrongdoing and the magistrate gave quite long sentencing homilies about how the rioting was something that should never happen again because it ‘reversim direction of country’.

In Honiara, the initial outbreak of violence in the form of stone throwing at Australian police and burning of PPF vehicles at the Parliament building after the Rini prime ministership was announced was certainly not a copybook riot-control performance by police with little experience in Australia of managing large stone-throwing crowds. The PPF Operations Response Team had only 13 people trained in riot control and the Solomon Islands police had no riot-control capability by April 2006 (Commission of Inquiry 2007:1). There was criticism that there was a failure by the police to cut off the bridge connecting the city to Chinatown—something former police commanders pointed out had been done in past times of unrest.

These problems point to some dilemmas of post-conflict police building. The Commission of Inquiry (2007:6) connected the intelligence failure to the standing down of the National Intelligence Unit as part of the project of depoliticising a police force that used its intelligence capability in the service of collecting dirt on enemies of the government of the day. And it connected the weak riot-control performance (for example, the use of tear gas in a way that blew back
on the police\textsuperscript{8} to dismantling the former riot-control capability of the Solomon Islands Police Force as part of a complete disarmament of the Solomon Islands police in 2003. Without intelligence and capability to project force, police are hamstrung in their effectiveness at core policing tasks; yet when these areas play a part in a coup and a descent into violent chaos, there can be a need to temporarily dismantle them. This dilemma can be bridged only by peacekeepers stepping into these functions for a period; between 2003 and 2006, this policing gap was not effectively closed.

Several prominent political figures were charged with intimidation, arson, inciting violence and like charges related to organising the riots—including two men who were appointed as ministers in the successor Sogavare government, Charles Dausabea and Nelson Ne’e, and former minister and MEF leader Alex Bartlett. Some defendants argued that RAMSI arranged for school fees and other benefits to be paid to witnesses (see Averre 2008);\textsuperscript{9} some RAMSI informants alleged that threats and inducements were made to persuade witnesses to retract their evidence. Amid the inappropriate pressure that probably was put on

\textsuperscript{8} ‘You tok, tok until you calm crowd, have a peaceful manner and you stop anger. You cannot do this as you shoot tear gas at them’ (Former Solomons police officer on Melanesian crowd management). The Speaker of the Parliament, Sir Peter Kenilorea, appealed to the PPF not to use tear gas and to allow more dialogue with the crowd by people like himself, but was ignored. A delegation from the National Council of Women, led by Hilda Kari, a National Peace Councillor, also asked the Australian police officers in charge at the Parliament to allow them to speak to and calm the agitated crowd—a role female leaders have traditionally performed at times of anger. The PPF decided it was dangerous to allow the women leaders to put themselves at risk in this way. But actually, no Solomon Islanders were injured by the mob, including the Solomon Islands police who stood at the front without protective equipment. Only the Australian PPF police who stood at the back with protective shields and helmets were injured because they were the ones seen as provoking the crowd and only PPF number-plated vehicles were destroyed during the unrest (Allen 2006:199).

\textsuperscript{9} There is now a legitimate worry that there could be an acceptance by the Australian Federal Police of paying cash to witnesses against priority Solomon Islands targets. Justice Mullins of the Supreme Court of Queensland, in finding that proceedings in former Solomon Islands attorney-general Julian Moti’s indictment for child sex abuse offences (which were dismissed by a Vanuatu court in 1999) should be stayed for abuse of process, concluded: ‘I am satisfied that the purpose that the financial support has been given to the complainant’s family members in Vanuatu is to ensure that those witnesses and the complainant remain willing to give evidence against the applicant. The level of the financial support is of great concern and the expectation it has created on the part of the complainant’s family in Vanuatu that the support remains ongoing whilst the prosecution continues. What would the complainant’s parents and brother have done to support themselves since February 2008, if the AFP had not provided full financial support of them and their dependants? It raises questions about the integrity of the administration of the Australian justice system, when witnesses who live in a foreign country, where it is alleged an Australian citizen committed acts of child sex abuse, expect to be fully supported by the Australian Government, until they give evidence at the trial in Australia of the Australian citizen. The conduct of the AFP in taking over the financial support of these witnesses who live in Vanuatu is an affront to the public conscience. It squarely raises whether the court can countenance the means used to achieve the end of keeping the prosecution of the charges against the applicant on foot’ (\textit{R v Moti} [2009] QSC 407). In addition to large payments to the alleged victim herself, her parents and brother living in Vanuatu received payment of more than A$81 000—living expenses that go a long way in Vanuatu! Considerable additional payments have been made since then. As this book was going to press, the Queensland Court of Appeal overturned Justice Mullins’ stay against prosecution, finding that the judge failed to ‘recognise that the questioned payments were not designed to, and did not, procure evidence from the prosecution witness; and the failure to pay sufficient regard to the fact that the payments made, while beyond existing guidelines, were not illegal’ (\textit{R v Moti} [2010] QCA 178).
witnesses by both sides, all the prosecutions for conspiracy to organise the riots failed. In part, the problem here was a wider one of the politicisation of justice under RAMSI (Averre 2008; Goldsmith and Dinnen 2007; O’Connor 2007b, 2009a, 2009b).

The Commission of Inquiry (2009:6–7, 31) into the riots expressed concern that ‘there still has been no in-house rigorous (“warts and all”) lessons-learned policing evaluation of what happened’. The commission found the RAMSI policing function to be underfunded. Yet the ratio of a number of PPF that has ranged between 200 and 330 at its peak to about 1000 Solomon Islands police is a ratio that could never be dreamed of in a UN peace operation in Africa or anywhere else. Yet not everything that happened was negative. Many PPF and Solomon Islands police showed admirable restraint. Had an indigenous protestor been shot by an Australian police officer, a much more violent dynamic might have unfolded. As it was, no-one was killed and not a shot was fired from any side. April 2006 was a litmus test of whether the disarming of Solomons civil society was working; the society passed the test. Indeed, in July 2006, the RAMSI chief, James Batley, reported that there had not been a single crime of any kind with a gun reported to the police in the previous 12 months (Islands Business, July 2006, p. 22). There have been only a few gun crimes in the seven years of RAMSI—a remarkable accomplishment for a society whose capital had been ruled by the gun. As we go to press in August 2010 a new prime minister, Danny Philip, was elected amid the kind of allegations of money changing hands that had been made of past elections, but this time without significant violence.

### Police-building exit

Senior PPF officers with experience from the disastrous policing disintegration in Timor-Leste that culminated in the 2006 fire-fights recall that when the United Nations, and therefore the UN Police Force (UNPOL), decided to leave, the international police took everything with them. Overnight, police stations that had been equipped with computers, vehicles, GPS, riot-control equipment and vehicles suddenly were lucky to be left with the odd chair and desk. In contrast, the PPF has developed a sophisticated strategy of graduated exit.

The first step towards exit we have already described. It involves a shift in emphasis from in-line policing to international advisors stepping back to allow locals to execute the policing. The second step is an audit of which police posts where the PPF are located will be ready first for complete withdrawal of advisors. That is, the decision is not when to withdraw all advisors; it is where

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10 ‘Destruction of property, then, is a constant feature of the pre-industrial crowd; but not the destruction of human lives’ (Rudé 1981:255).
to withdraw advisors first. In the Solomons case, the contexts from which the PPF have been completely withdrawn first are islands without serious crime problems, where domestic violence is being addressed, without major risks of re-ignition of ethnic conflict and where traditional reconciliation by elders of theft and violence works well. Before withdrawal occurs, an audit of police post needs is conducted to assess what equipment the internationals should leave behind, or add. After withdrawal, monitoring protocols are followed to check that the diagnosis was correct that this was a police post that could manage well (or better) without being propped up by outsiders. If the follow-up auditing indicates that certain problems have spun out of control as a result of the withdrawal, a decision may be made to return. If audit reveals the whole program of progressive exit to be going well then it may be accelerated.

One prominent Chinese business leader had an interesting perspective on the broader policy framework for thinking about RAMSI’s exit:

What is needed for RAMSI is not an exit strategy but for RAMSI to say to Solomon Islanders: ‘What is your strategy to take over? What is your vision for your country. You must tell us. We must not tell you.’ It’s about the leadership of politicians—the masses follow.

**Returning to lessons of colonial policing**

There is currently a debate about whether a contemporary Western model of policing is the best one for Solomon Islands. Initially, this was another matter on which RAMSI was insufficiently sensitive to the limitations of the predominantly Australian policing model it was seeking to transfer to Honiara. We say Honiara because, even though a lot of fine policing was done by the PPF in more remote locations, the overwhelming majority of both PPF and Solomon Islands police have been located in Honiara and the majority of the remaining police are located in Auki or Gizo. Eighty-five per cent of the largely Australian-funded police cars supplied to the Solomon Islands Police Force are located in Honiara. Solomons Deputy Police Commissioner Sikua is leading a trial in three communities of a part-time community officer scheme using as a consultant a Bougainvillean police officer with experience of this kind of scheme. The plan is for the first 20 community officers to be in place in mid-2010. This has the support of the PPF and seconded New Zealand commissioner Marshall as an effort to return policing to the villages.

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11 Domestic violence prevalence rates are high by international standards in Solomon Islands (Government of Solomon Islands 2002:40) and there is some evidence suggesting they increased during the Tension (AusAID 2008; Pacific Islands Forum 2004:36).
Beyond leaders within the Solomon Islands Police Force itself, former prime minister and the current Speaker, Sir Peter Kenilorea (Kenilorea and Moore 2008:155–7), is one leading advocate of a rethink of the current policing model as one insufficiently focused on the villages of a village society. In British colonial times, Sir Peter served as a district officer. Among his responsibilities in that role was supervising the local police (village constables, ples men) (Kabutaulaka 2008:98; Wolfers 1983) and serving as a travelling lay magistrate under the Solomon Islands version of governance by patrol.

Another leader, Manasseh Sogavare, was cynical about RAMSI’s concentration of resources on punishing the crimes of the past during the time when he was prime minister:

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

Elsewhere (Dinnen and Braithwaite 2009), it has been argued that while Western models of urban policing could be an apt option for policing cities such as Honiara in developing countries, something more akin to colonial models of decentralised, indirect policing might better serve the villages of village societies. Mahmood Mamdani (1996, 1999) conceives of the typical African state as ‘bifurcated’. On the one hand there is a ‘civilised’ urban society spawned by a history of direct rule and now practising a form of constitutional democracy. But most of the society is in fact a patchwork quilt of societies beyond the reach of the Constitution and profoundly ethnicised by a history of indirect rule and resentment of the predations of the capital. It could be that the Solomon Islands of the late 2000s is an even more bifurcated society than it was pre-RAMSI, making a bifurcated policing model even more relevant.12

Many share Sir Peter Kenilorea’s view that if policing had been working effectively, the violence would have been calmed early in 1998 and there would have been no crisis. This would not have been accomplished by riot police or by an armed police field force. On Sir Peter’s analysis, the problems started in rural Guadalcanal, not in the city. What failed was rural policing. He believes that in the rural colonial plantation economy intolerance and anger between different

12 For Mamdani, indirect rule through village constables and headmen was part of a fabric of oppressive colonial clientalism. It was ‘decentralized despotism’ (Berman 1998:316). But that of course does not preclude a post-colonial leader such as Sir Peter Kenilorea harnessing colonial technologies of policing to projects of contemporary emancipation from violence and commercial exploitation.
ethnic groups from different islands were rife. Village constables, headmen and district officers above them became sophisticated at reconciling these tensions, and particularly at nipping in the bud any rabble-rousing towards violence. That was their job and they had failed at their job if conflict spun out of control on their patch. They became skilled at homilies of ‘when in Rome, do as the Romans do’ and at admonishing one group to practise more tolerance towards another group. Sir Peter’s view was also that colonial village courts were adept at assisting the police with give and take on inter-cultural clashes over land and other differences.

The village constable system collapsed soon after the demise of colonialism because part of the deal to placate separatists in Western Province was to hand over some important responsibilities to the provincial level of government. Rural policing was one of these. But because no revenue was transferred to go with the responsibility, village constables withered away for the want of allowances or any other support from their provincial capital. Ironically, one Western Province parliamentarian said that after the police presence in Western Province collapsed during the Tension (when there were threats from Bougainville Revolutionary Army militants staging armed sorties in and out of the province), ‘a citizen community watch was set up…which while it was running was more effective than the police had been before or since’.

**Police and logs**

Dinnen and Braithwaite (2009) argue that the revolution in Western policing started by Sir Robert Peel in establishing the London Metropolitan Police in 1829 was a good thing for the policing of Western cities. But it was a bad model for the policing of rural England and the rural spaces of white settler colonies such as Australia. One reason why was that the London Metropolitan Police model was of a paramilitary police concentrating on crime (and quelling riots and urban disorder). The older model of English village constables was not militarised, consisted mostly of part-timers and was not myopically focused on crime control. The English (and colonial American) village constables, like their counterparts on continental Europe, were regulatory generalists. They took care of consumer protection regulation, weights and measures regulation, early forms of environmental regulation such as pollution of rivers, regulation

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13 It is often argued with some justification that it was the Irish colonial model of policing more than the London model that was exported across the British Empire. This was an even more militarised model than that of the London Police and more oriented to terrorising dangers to the state and suppressing political agitation (Ellison and O’Reilly 2008:398). But it was also a Peelian model in that it was forged during the time of three chief secretaries of Ireland: the Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel and Sir Henry Goulburn, the lifelong friend and deputy of Peel. These three all became parliamentarians who played prominent roles in the formation of the London Metropolitan Police (Ellison and O’Reilly 2008:399).
of liquor licences, workplace safety laws and all forms of regulation up to and including the criminal law’s regulation of theft and violence. One of the sad things about the demise of this generalist policing model for rural citizens of the West is that when it was replaced by Peelian police focused on crime control, no-one took an interest in consumer rip-offs and other regulatory offences that afflicted rural people. In Western cities, a knock-on effect of the police becoming specialists in crime control was the creation from the mid-nineteenth century of further specialist regulatory agencies to deal with other urban problems such as factory inspectorates, consumer protection agencies, health inspectorates to inspect places that served food, and so on. But these other specialist regulatory agencies—all much smaller than the police—had offices only in large cities. Their inspectors almost never visited rural villages. In early modern England and America, villagers complained about a regulatory abuse to the village constable; in late modern England and America, they learned to lump it.

Our Solomon Islands fieldwork reveals the same sad consequences for village people of Peelian policing modernity. Villagers said to us that they complained to the police about regulatory abuses by logging companies. The reply of the police was that this was not their responsibility; that was a matter for an inspector from the Forestry Department. But the Forestry Department inspectors were in an office in far-away Honiara. And they had no budget for travel to a distant island to respond to a complaint such as our villager made. As with pre-Peelian English village policing, in the days of colonial policing, the Solomon Islands villager could take a complaint about misuse of her/his land, forests or rivers to chiefs, then to the village constable, and if no satisfaction was obtained, then to the headman, and if none was obtained there, to a district officer like young Sir Peter Kenilorea sitting as a magistrate. That was a world of more practical, on-the-ground checks and balances against natural resource rip-offs.

Hence, one of the reasons we see the current Solomon Islands Police Force experiment with a dispersed, part-time community officer scheme as a promising development is that it holds out some hope of a law enforcement system that might return to doing something to respond to villagers’ grievances about abuses by loggers. Village constables can receive some basic training on something as important to the nation as forestry law; they can provide the evidence to withdraw licences from lawless loggers and can arrest unlicensed loggers.

Saving the tropical forest is not the only desperate need for which this Solomon Islands Police Force policy shift might be an apt response. Foreign loggers so economically dominate locales where they log that they become a law unto themselves. Police intelligence suggests they use being above the law to traffic weapons and other illicit goods such as pornography on logging ships. Not only do they traffic pornography; they produce it by exploiting indigenous children, according to the systematic research of the Church of Melanesia on the
large island of Makira, which is believed to reflect a more widespread problem (Herbert 2007). It was found that village children were raped, sold into marriage and used for pornography on a remarkably wide scale by Malaysian loggers. Child prostitution was found in every village visited on Makira.

Last year I worked at the camp. There were seven Malaysian men there, and every one was married to a young girl—13 or 14. They are not interested in the older girls—once they are 18. (Solomon Islander former logger quoted in Herbert 2007:25)

This was happening at a place where the nearest police officer was three hours away by boat.

**Corruption**

When RAMSI issued a pamphlet to explain its mandate, on the list of things ‘RAMSI has come to help with’, the second item was ‘Corruption: making the system more open and honest’ (first on the list was ‘Restoring law and order’ and the third priority was ‘Sorting out the government finances’) (Office of the Special Coordinator 2004). For RAMSI’s first four years, corruption was in fact well down on its list of priorities. A dilemma was that ‘[h]ad all the allegations [of corruption] been acted on, there would have been few leaders left to run the government’ (Dinnen 2008b:15). We must recognise that Melanesian officials and Members of Parliament, ‘like all Melanesians, are enmeshed in networks of social and financial obligation, and that this often influences their actions as elected officials’ (Morgan 2005:5). There is a lot of corruption in Solomon Islands because there is a lot of indigenous demand for it that must be satisfied if politicians are to survive in a Melanesian political culture; and there have been spikes in the supply of foreign cash for corruption since the logging boom started in the 1990s and since the conflict from 1998 created temptations for foreign interests, notably Taiwan, to curry favour with embattled leaders by helping out with slush funds for development.

It seems possible to recognise these realities while being openly committed to raising the bar on corruption control over time. This could mean that at any point of time, the worst few abusers of conflicts of interest would be in the process of being tackled. Consequently, the worst abuses would over time become progressively less corrupt.\(^\text{14}\) So the journey of reaching Western-style conflict-of-interest standards would take many decades, rather than the centuries it took

\(^{14}\) For a more detailed discussion of how this raising-the-bar strategy involves announcements that from certain dates targeted forms of law breaking will no longer be tolerated, see Braithwaite (2005:186–8). Solomon Islands Inland Revenue is an example of an agency that has progressively lifted the bar on what forms of tax compliance will be turned around next.
in the West. Ordinary Solomon Islanders who we spoke with saw the Prime Minister at the time of the RAMSI intervention, Sir Allan Kemakeza, Finance Minister, Snyder Rini, Premier, Ezekiel Alebua, leading businessman Robert Goh, Andrew Nori and some others as ‘big fish’ whom RAMSI was letting off for corruption and embezzlement while it targeted enforcement on militants whom they saw as ‘used’ by such big-men. In many cases, locals saw those imprisoned as guilty of little more than defending their wantoks.

RAMSI did make locking up militants its priority during its first four years. Since 2007, however, much of the prosecutorial focus has shifted and two former prime ministers who were central players in the drama of this conflict, Kemakeza and Alebua, did go to prison for financial crimes concerning reintegration and reconciliation funds. A number of corrupt former and serving cabinet ministers were also convicted of various crimes and it is believed at the time of writing that further high-profile corruption prosecutions are possible. All the prosecutions have been of indigenous officials who served in official government positions; there have been none of non-indigenous business leaders in the foreign ‘shadow governments’ we will discuss below, who activated the movement towards a kleptocratic state they could influence (Moore 2008:65).

It is noteworthy that only a long-term peace operation such as RAMSI could have succeeded in the complex investigations required for locking up powerful politicians such as former prime ministers. Had RAMSI left after three years, it would have left with the people feeling it had gone aggressively only after militants; it would have left a large pile of unfinished investigations into the corruption of the ‘big fish’ behind them. Other nations that have tackled cultures of loyalty to lineages trumping ethical duties to national institutions on the demand side, and foreign resources corruption making the supply side easier, have not managed across-the-board transformations in just a few years. It follows that commitment to tackle corruption must be indigenous and long term.

These realities also mean that education that instils a sense of obligation to the nation among elites whose education is funded by the nation is an important ingredient of corruption control (see Fukuyama 2008). Large sections of educated elites in many developing countries have managed to cultivate multiple identities in which on the one hand they hold to a strict moral code of duty to the institution in which they serve the nation and on the other hand they find alternative ways of sustaining their fidelity to networks of obligation and reciprocity with their lineage or village. A high quality of values dialogue within an outstanding indigenous education system is a more important solution
to this problem than educating elites in the West. Developing-country elites educated in the West can easily dismiss anti-corruption values imbued within those Western institutions as relevant only to life in the West.¹⁵

The realities of a supply of foreign funds that has fuelled corruption go to the potential benefits of denying logging and fishing licences to foreign interests, reserving them for more cash-strapped indigenous entrepreneurs. This policy option will be discussed further below. There are in fact many strands to the web of controls that can be put in place to prevent corruption—from engaging civil society through organisations such as Transparency International and the anti-corruption pledges promoted during the 2006 election by local church-backed NGO Winds of Change to the state anti-corruption institutions discussed in the next paragraphs. To RAMSI’s credit, today it is promoting a multidimensional approach to corruption control where each strand in the fabric of control is liable to snap, while the whole fabric develops some potential resilience over time. The difficulty is whether an anti-corruption fabric woven on a foreign loom will unravel when the short history of foreign presence ends.

Until the 1990s, discussion of corruption in Solomon Islands focused on politicians and civil servants using public funds to favour their wantoks. In the 1990s, elite corruption tied to the governance of a shadow economy of logging, tax and customs evasion, licences and contracts for big investments such as casinos and bribery of politicians to elect the prime minister¹⁶ progressively transformed the corruption debate. Some contemporary commentary can be myopically preoccupied with this ‘big fish’ side of the problem. Our argument is that control strategies must attend to both demand and supply-side realities. Since independence, elections have become progressively more corrupt (Aqorau 2008:264). Civil servants in departments such as Forestry, Environment and Conservation¹⁷ gradually became part of a corruption machine—by no means all of them; some struggle bravely against the culture. Like fish, these departments rotted from the head down—from the minister down. Fisheries was another department that rotted from the head down at the behest of foreign fishing interests who captured political leaders and the civil servants who served them, getting licences on favourable terms, underreporting catches and paying little revenue on the nation’s second-largest export (after logs).

When civil servants who were honest or uninvolved in corruption (beyond doing the odd favour for wantoks) left or were pushed, they were replaced by

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¹⁵ Also see below the discussion of Morgan Brigg’s (2009) interesting thinking on wantokism as a potential resource for fighting corruption by securing checks and balances in a Melanesian way.

¹⁶ In the 2006 elections only five politicians signed the Winds of Change pledge that they would not accept bribes in relation to the vote for prime minister and it is believed bribes of S$20 000–60 000 were paid to persuade members to change sides in the vote for the prime ministership (Alasia 2008:128–9).

¹⁷ Another part of the wilful politics of neutering its regulatory effectiveness was that its regulatory function was starved of resources for monitoring and enforcement (Allen forthcoming; Bennett 2000:253).
loyalists to corrupt civil servants who in turn were loyal to corrupt politicians. A culture of corruption having been created from the top down by generations of corrupt ministers, it then became difficult for an honest minister to assume power and control a culture of corruption that permeated a department. Perhaps the most important forms of corruption in terms of millions of dollars in the past decade have been by ministers for finance issuing remissions of customs duties or reducing the determined value of log exports for customs assessment (see Allen forthcoming). Allocation of prime Honiara land to commercial interests has been another area of formidable corruption.

The Public Service Commission is an institution that once had an important role in corruption prevention, setting professional standards and discipline for civil servants, and especially education for integrity and efficiency (along with the public service training school, which was closed in the 1980s). By the time of RAMSI’s arrival, the Public Service Commission was colluding in corrupt government (Roughan 2004). The Leadership Code Commission has been responsible since 1986 for investigating corruption and other forms of official misconduct by politicians. In practice, it became an institution tamed by corrupt politicians long before it had a chance to mature into an effective anti-corruption institution. A deeply defective statute is one of many problems that beset it (Wood Report 2005). It is a body whose chairman says it is responsive to complaints, yet we found during 2006 that no-one ever answered the phone! The only way to get attention was to physically arrive at their office—hard to do for a villager remote from the capital. The Chairman of the Leadership Code Commission could not tell the Commission of Inquiry (2009:42, 43) into the 2006 Honiara riots ‘how many leaders had been dealt with over the past three years’—not even the most basic information on how many cases his commission had investigated. It also could not produce for the Commission of Inquiry any annual report to Parliament.18

One year after independence (1979),19 the Auditor-General had a professional staff of 23 auditors and accountants; by 2004, it had only one professional staff member (Roughan 2004:19). In that year, the Ombudsman had only two investigators, neither with specialist ombudsman investigative training, and also went three years in a row without producing an annual report (Roughan 2004:24; see also Rawlings 2006). Even after considerable rebuilding of the Ombudsman’s office, in 2008, fewer than 2 per cent of respondents to the

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18 John Wood commented here: ‘Not that it is an excuse, but there is no provision in their legislation for them to do so!’

19 The Auditor-General, the Leadership Code Commission and the Ombudsman were all accountability institutions established under the 1978 independence Constitution.
People’s Survey mentioned the Ombudsman in response to the question of ‘who should be informed if a Solomon Islands Police Force officer is not doing their job properly?’ (up to three responses could be given) (McMurray 2008:51).

Since 2005, the Auditor-General’s office has greatly increased its capacity and integrity. It has caught up on the backlog of uncompleted reports left by its quiescent predecessors. It produced 10 biting special audits in 2005 and 2006 exposing S$433 million in corrupt or fraudulent disbursements by the government (Office of the Auditor-General 2007:4). Unfortunately, in 2009, those reports were being received by a Public Accounts Committee of the Parliament chaired by a member sentenced to 22 months’ prison for his actions when finance minister of corruptly approving a custom duties exemption for his wife. An appeal court overturned his conviction on the grounds that, as a minister, he was not an ‘officer’ in the terms of the Penal Code’s provisions prohibiting official corruption in the Public Service. For the moment, reports of the Auditor-General exposing corruption in government are going nowhere after they are tabled in the Parliament.

The Solomon Islands media, ‘while free, has been highly docile in its coverage and treatment of the corruption problem’ because of its ‘close relations with the establishment’ (Roughan 2004:11). While there was considerable intimidation of the media between 1998 and 2003 by militants aligned with corrupt political leaders, the main problem has always been one of self-censorship. Nevertheless, the media is one of the essential strands in a web of controls against corruption that is in more resilient shape than in many developing countries and this resilience comes from indigenous journalists. The idea of a web of controls against corruption is that when state strands of the web snap, civil society strands such as the media and anti-corruption NGOs will step into the gap by exposing, and proposing repairs to, the rent in the fabric. In the difficult history of unravelling and repairing anti-corruption fabric, progress and regress are ever-present possibilities. Leaders committed to a multidimensional long-term struggle to raise the bar are what count; nihilists who believe corruption can never change because it is irredeemably cultural are the problem.
Figure 5.5 The three pillars of RAMSI’s whole-of-government approach
Machinery of government: RAMSI’s priority for statebuilding

RAMSI has three pillars: ‘law and justice’, ‘economic governance and growth’ and ‘machinery of government’ (see Figure 5.5). We have discussed the work of the first two pillars in the preceding sections, but only some of the dimensions of the machinery of government work. Much of the machinery of government pillar of RAMSI was about strengthening the accountability institutions that were vital to corruption control: the Ombudsman, the Leadership Code Commission and the Office of the Auditor-General. But there were also elements of the pillar concerned with electoral assistance, strengthening Parliament and parliamentary committees (undertaken through the UNDP) and strengthening provincial governance (which was in fact very focused on Honiara and Guadalcanal). But the biggest aspect of the machinery of government pillar was ‘public service repair and reform’, which covered areas as diverse as staff development, information technology support, refurbishment of offices, corporate planning, annual reporting, cabinet processes, government housing and recruitment. The machinery of government pillar completed RAMSI’s whole-of-government approach (Patrick and Brown 2007; Wielders 2008:139).

Execution within each pillar was by a hybrid of expatriates working in-line within departments until it was felt that an indigenous counterpart was trained to do the job. At that point—which varied from department to department and job to job—the expatriate moved from an in-line position to being an advisor (and sometimes back again, as we saw with the police). Coordination among the pillars has been a rocky road. Yet coordination is a strength of RAMSI compared with other peace operations. The three leaders of the RAMSI pillars meet weekly under the Chairmanship of the Special Coordinator, a senior Australian diplomat, and at times go out into the community together to work with civil society to diagnose problems holistically and seek holistic solutions. International peace operations before RAMSI tended to be thought of as having a peacekeeping phase in which the priority was security, followed by a post-conflict reconstruction phase that occurred mostly after peacekeepers had departed. RAMSI integrated these from the outset.

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20 There are also consultative mechanisms that brought RAMSI, the Solomon Islands Government and the Pacific Islands Forum together regularly in Honiara; these newer mechanisms were a response to longstanding complaints about Australian dominance of the mission. See the discussion of the Enhanced Consultative Mechanism among these partners online, viewed 19 June 2010, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-165067373.html>
Whole-of-government versus whole-of-society strategies

Integration with an armed peace operation dramatically changed the Australian-led development strategy for the Solomons. Before RAMSI, the AusAID country strategy had been that since the government was not functioning well because of corruption and rule of the gun, it was best for donors to work through civil society with a bottom-up development model rather than through the state: ‘If you can’t work with the government, then work beside the government’ (AusAID official, 2006). Indeed, most international donors had that strategy—Taiwan being an important exception. The hope of this strategy was that a strengthened civil society would gradually make demands on the government for a more effective democracy; and meanwhile donors would get on with development at village level through civil society. While it was a credible strategy in the circumstances pre-RAMSI, the new analysis at the time of planning the intervention in early 2003 became that rapid progress would become possible only with an armed intervention that made the streets safe and then moved on to tackle corruption. That was a credible strategy, too, even though it was strong on the detail of how to create safety (and achieved it quickly) and weak on detail of how to tackle corruption (and had barely begun to tackle this in 2009).

With RAMSI assuming the monopoly on the use of force, it became the quintessence of government under the new strategy. Its in-line staff in government positions only slowly stepped back from being a parallel government to the elected one. So the new strategy was not only muscular in terms of the security pillar, it was also muscular in re-engineering the ‘machinery of government’. Such in-line muscularity in rebuilding the state was possible only because RAMSI had assumed the core legitimacy associated with the monopoly over the use of force and guaranteeing the safety of citizens, not least of a prime minister who feared assassination. The three-pillared whole-of-government approach also changed the AusAID model of intervention from government by contract (managing contractors and paying by results) to return to a model of direct command and control in which AusAID staff and Australian and New Zealand public servants seconded to Solomon Islands government departments, rather than contractors, were in key meetings with Solomon Islands officials. This was better for whole-of-government coordination. But it also created a ‘crowded stage’ (Kabutaulaka 2006) that sometimes pushed off indigenous actors; or, as Ignatieff (2003:162) put it, ‘sucked out’ capacity rather than built it. Contractors resumed importance in other ways as RAMSI aged and a small cadre of contractors remained the only ones who had experience of the Solomons over many years, as the public servants left after one or two brief secondments.
The AusAID management model also moved from Canberra-centred management to in-country management, though Canberra bureaucracies varied in their willingness to devolve. For the most part, the real power was with the three leaders of the RAMSI pillars who were coordinating in Honiara and not with the folk they theoretically answered to in three Canberra departments. Such a bold shift from a bottom-up model that had been regarded internationally as quite sophisticated to a top-down whole-of-government model attracted some international acclaim in statebuilding circles.

A criticism of the shift could be that it involved too much of a rejection of the former civil society model as ‘not working’. The ‘Winds of Change’, to use the name of one of the local movements demanding a non-corrupt democracy, were blowing, albeit feebly compared with the wounds of change inflicted by militias. The old civil society strategy required patience and might better have been viewed as something AusAID would encourage to bubble along in the background. This would have meant that instead of shifting from a civil society strategy to a whole-of-government strategy (Hameiri 2009b), RAMSI would have seen itself as shifting to a whole-of-society strategy that in 2003 slanted spending priority to the security sector first, then to economic ministries’ reform, then to other institutions of the state, then back to bottom-up development that prioritised village society. Instead, there was a sense that statebuilding had transcended support for villages and the participatory empowerment of village citizens. The police constable, for example, was not to be thought of as an important part of the village-level development leadership; he or she was part of a whole-of-government team that was fixing problems of urban-centred government.

We are perhaps not being totally fair to AusAID in the previous paragraph, as the Community Sector Program that it funded pre-RAMSI (when it was called the Community Peace and Restoration Fund) continued to be bilaterally funded post-RAMSI, albeit as a poor sister of the intervention. Because village-level development was so neglected under RAMSI, one Western Province parliamentarian was concerned that ‘rural people are losing confidence’. People were discouraged when the promise of earlier work such as the 1997–99 UNDP Participatory Planning Program was dropped. That program developed village-level needs assessments in an impressively collaborative way; during the Tension, it was cut without ever doing anything to follow through with implementation of the plans.

It might be said that RAMSI arrived with a set of templates for rebuilding the state and this priority was steadfast. Participatory bottom-up alternatives that came, for example, from the work of the National Peace Council that RAMSI discredited, were viewed as distractions from implementing the statist templates. One debate that RAMSI and the donor community more generally
sought to choke off was over federalism. There was widespread post-conflict popularity among political leaders from most provinces for replacing the centralised political system with a federal model (Allen and Dinnen 2010), albeit with considerable resistance from Malaitan elites. There are reasons to be wary of federalism as a quick fix to excessive centralism. Where part of the problem to be fixed is that centralism has enabled waste by national elites, provincial governments can proliferate opportunities for waste and corruption by new provincial elites who monopolise power to the exclusion of village needs just as much as the old national elites. The Parliamentary Inquiry (2009:218–19) into RAMSI took up both the advocacy of federalism and opposition to it by quoting Andrew Nori:

Mr Andrew Nori, former Member of Parliament…argued that the desire for federalism is based on an assumption that Solomon Islands’ current economic, social and political problems are constitutional problems. This, however, is inaccurate because what the people normally complain about is poor every day services. Mr Nori subsequently blamed politicians for this misplaced assumption. He argued that when people complain about poor services, politicians take these complaints and translate them into constitutional problems, the solution to which is supposedly constitutional reform in the form of federalism. He explained…

In a small nation like Solomon Islands, with due respect, I believe a well run national government, well resourced with good linkage and a sound delivery system to our people, can serve the interest of Solomon Islanders, because political structures only serve politicians. It is economic structures and commercial structures that benefit people in rural areas. (Parliamentary Inquiry 2009:218–19)

Yet a debate over decentralisation was one the Solomons had to have in the aftermath of the conflict. It is a debate that could indeed have led to the conclusion that village levels of governance more than provincial levels are the priority for enhanced support. On the other hand, it could have led to bolder locally initiated constitutional architectures that could not be predicted in advance of having the debate (Allen and Dinnen 2010). Building to standard templates imported from the West is statebuilding on shaky foundations, which, as in this case, can reflect international more than local priorities. RAMSI has kept the lid on debates for constitutional reform that enjoy strong currents of local support. For many years, a review of federalism has been stuck in the Constitutional Reform Unit in the Prime Minister’s Office, with little sign of engaging the community with its work.