

2014

RtoP's Second Pillar: the Responsibility to Assist in Theory and Practice in Solomon Islands

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Publication Details

Hawksley, C. and Georgeou, N. (2014). RtoP's Second Pillar: the Responsibility to Assist in Theory and Practice in Solomon Islands. *AP R2P Brief*, 4 (1), 1-9.

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Abstract

This paper explores the implementation of a regional capacity-building program in Solomon Islands, a state that experienced significant violence and political tension between 1998 and 2003. As Bellamy notes, the July 2003 intervention of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) is a useful and relevant case study for understanding the operationalization of Pillar II of RtoP, which we have termed the "Responsibility to Assist" (RtoA).¹ While RAMSI has not consciously adopted RtoP language in its operations, the rationale for the intervention included humanitarian as well as wider regional security concerns.² The mission's emphasis on developing the state's capacities in policing has supported the development of a human rights culture. RAMSI is thus illustrative of RtoP's Pillar II as it demonstrates a regional intervention to enhance a state's capacity to protect its population from mass atrocities.

Keywords

rtoP, second, pillar, solomon, responsibility, islands, assist, theory, practice

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Law

Publication Details

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Introduction

This paper explores the implementation of a regional capacity-building program in Solomon Islands, a state that experienced significant violence and political tension between 1998 and 2003. As Bellamy notes, the July 2003 intervention of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) is a useful and relevant case study for understanding the operationalization of Pillar II of RtoP, which we have termed the "Responsibility to Assist" (RtoA).¹ While RAMSI has not consciously adopted RtoP language in its operations, the rationale for the intervention included humanitarian as well as wider regional security concerns.² The mission's emphasis on developing the state's capacities in policing has supported the development of a human rights culture. RAMSI is thus illustrative of RtoP's Pillar II as it demonstrates a regional intervention to enhance a state's capacity to protect its population from mass atrocities.

Between 2003-2013 RAMSI had three areas of concentration: Law and Justice, Economic Governance and Growth, and Machinery of Government. The latter has included programs such as Public Service improvement, and strengthening national accountability institutions, parliament, the electoral system, provincial government and encouraging quotas for Women in Government.³ In this case study we focus on the Law and Justice program and its police capacity-building ("police-building") component with the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). First we situate policing within peace operations, then show how RtoA may be applied to Solomon Islands. Finally, we review the RAMSI/RSIPF relationship from its deployment to preparation for withdrawal, making reference to notions of good governance, human security and gender.

The case study of Solomon Islands demonstrates that the possible or potential threat of mass human rights abuse was reduced significantly by the RAMSI intervention. RAMSI's presence has developed the capacity of the state to guard against deterioration of law and order, thus supporting the objectives of Pillar II. Early intervention coupled with capacity-building negated the need for later full-scale military intervention to prevent abuses of human rights.



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RtoA and Policing

In 2005 the World Summit Declaration Paragraph 139 committed:

... to helping all States build capacity to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity *and to assisting those which are under stress before crises and conflicts break out.*⁴

This sentence is significant because it points to the connections between RtoP, state-building and Security Sector Reform (SSR). When elaborating on RtoP's "Three Pillars" in 2011, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon argued that Pillar II involves essentially two types of assistance—structural and operational. Operational prevention takes place in an environment where human rights abuses are either occurring or imminent and "thus may be related to the third pillar, on response, just as structural prevention is linked to the first pillar on State responsibility".⁵

Contemporary peace operations are increasingly framed in terms of a Chapter VII mandate and usually involve some measure of SSR as part of a broader commitment to improving human rights protection. The military are the most obvious focus of SSR, however international police have been working to assist local police in peace operations with the United Nations since the first Congo crisis in 1960. The formation of a specific UN Police Division in 2000 and its integration into the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in 2007 reflected the growing importance of policing in peacekeeping. Further evidence of the importance of police in SSR is shown by the increase in UN Police (UNPOL) numbers, which climbed from 5,840 in 1995 to over 13,500 in 2012.⁶ By 2013 police constituted 14% of uniformed UN Peace Operations personnel across all missions. Regional operations such as RAMSI also reflect the growing importance of policing in state-building and human rights protection.

The Solomon Islands conflict

Between 1998 and 2003 there was growing political and social unrest in and around Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands, and throughout the provinces of Guadalcanal and Malaita, but other parts of the country were generally unaffected. The government of Solomon Islands became increasingly unable to contain these tensions, which led directly to the formation of militia groups. The militias self-identified in terms of ethnicity, and they cast their opponents in the same terms. The Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army (GRA), which later became the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM), claimed to represent the 'indigenous' people of Guadalcanal— termed 'Guale'—while the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) arose in response to defend the interests of the Malaitan-descended population who were the initial targets of the violence. Many Malaitans had settled on land in the Honiara area in the post-WWII period, and Guale concerns about Malaitan domination of government bureaucracy, institutions including the police, and control over resources, gave rise to the tensions. The conflict resulted in around 250 murders, with some 35,000 people displaced, high levels of gender-based violence (GBV), and a general breakdown of law and order around Honiara and parts of Guadalcanal Province.

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RtoA in Solomon Islands

RAMSI is a regional initiative of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), a 16-member organisation of independent Pacific islands states. While RAMSI predates the Three Pillars Approach, the regional response to a deteriorating security situation in Solomon Islands can be viewed through a prism of RtoA (Pillar II). RAMSI was “operational prevention” as it halted a deterioration of human rights abuses, but its focus quickly transformed into “structural prevention” through capacity-building.

RAMSI is generally considered a successful intervention and state-building mission: it enforced, and then maintained, peace and security and has suffered minimal casualties. RAMSI has not attempted to deal with the underlying social and political problems that caused the tensions (particularly land tenure), but its presence has promoted investment in Solomon Islands and this has had a positive effect on economic growth with the GDP now almost triple that of 2004.⁷

RAMSI is now in its second decade of capacity-building and provides an interesting case study of RtoA because:

- The intervention occurred in a pre-emptive sense, that is, prior to mass atrocities.
- It is a regional, not a UN, intervention and has had a consistent mandate of capacity-building.
- Solomon Islands has no military forces, so the SSR has involved only police (RSIPF).

RAMSI has engaged with the difficult, uncertain and complicated practice of state building. Its capacity-building objectives support the state’s human rights protection responsibilities as they seek to induce a change in the political/security environment from one that is prone to mass atrocities to “one that is less so”.⁸ In terms of RtoA, RAMSI contributes to state strengthening. It reaffirms the centrality of the Solomon Islands state, and aims to bolster the responsiveness of its security institution (the RSIPF) to human rights abuses.

While not a UN mission, RAMSI has nonetheless been influenced by ongoing policy initiatives surrounding security and development. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 on *Women, Peace and Security* recognises the different experiences of women and men in conflict situations, and highlights the need for the involvement of women in peace building. However, the Townsville Peace Agreement (2000) only involved male combatants, and the exclusion of women from the peace talks served to marginalise those women who had played a central role in facilitating negotiations between the militant groups. This initial oversight laid the foundation for the continued exclusion of women from future key roles in the peace-building process in Solomon Islands.

Recently however RAMSI has sought to develop a focus on women and gender issues. Gender-based violence (GBV) in Solomon Islands is prominent and appears to enjoy high levels of social acceptance amongst both men and women.⁹ Campaigns aimed at curbing violence against women, for example *White Ribbon Day* and *16 Days of Activism*, are supported by RAMSI, aid donors, and NGOs,

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as well as by the RSIPF and Solomon Islands Government (SIG). The national parliament is discussing laws to protect the human rights of women (*Family Protection Bill*), and a specific protection for women has been suggested for a proposed new constitution. Small gains perhaps, but such state support lays the foundations of a legal and institutional framework that supports human rights protection.

The RAMSI Intervention

Between 2003-2013 Australia funded RAMSI at an average of \$250-300 million per year, and has provided the vast majority of the personnel for the RAMSI mission, both ministerial advisors and police.¹⁰ RAMSI's Participating Police Force (PPF) numbers have varied over time: on deployment they were as high as 330, but by late 2013 had dropped to around 150. Most of the PPF are from Australia, often seconded from state police forces into the Australian Federal Police *International Deployment Group*. New Zealand contributes police, advisors and support equivalent to NZD\$40 million per year. All member states involved in RAMSI have contributed police personnel at some time.

RAMSI deployed in July 2003 with a legal framework that has meant that the sovereignty of Solomon Islands is respected—essentially RAMSI operates with the permission of the SIG and can be asked to leave at any time. In practice the support of RAMSI became essential for the state to function, leading to questions of how sustainable the state will be once RAMSI departs, which is projected to be in 2017.

We conceptualise RAMSI's capacity-building of the RSIPF into five phases. Organisational reform and building trust between the community and the police have underpinned Phases 2-5, while there are some initiatives on matters such as training, human resource development, gender and community education, that run across all phases.

RAMSI'S police-building Phases

1. Security and Stabilisation (2003-2004)
2. Governance and Reform (2004-2008)
3. Infrastructure Development (2008-2011)
4. Preparation for Transition (2011-2013)
5. Transition (2013-2017)

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Phase 1: Security and Stabilisation

RAMSI was always intended to be a police-led mission, although initially it required an 1800-strong military contingent to provide the logistical capability to assist the police. Backed by the RAMSI military, police moved quickly into areas of conflict, disarmed militias and arrested armed criminals.

At this time RAMSI forces also disarmed the RSIPF. With violence contained, the military drew back and the Participating Police Force (PPF) took over the general management of law and order, working with and alongside what remained of the RSIPF. In theory the two police forces would work together with the community to rebuild trust and a secure environment, however, given that some 400 RSIPF eventually lost their jobs under RAMSI as they were implicated in the tensions, with some later charged with criminal offences, building community trust in the police was, and remains, a particularly fraught issue.¹¹

Phase 2: Governance and Reform

Part of building trust was generational renewal. RAMSI initially took over the coordination of new recruit training, but this was devolved to the RSIPF in 2006. The first post-intervention cadet class was run in 2004, and there have usually been two cohorts per year of 30 cadets each, although there was a very large class of 68 in 2012. By 2013 twenty cadet classes had graduated. Over half of the RSIPF (600 of 1130 officers) have now completed their police cadet training since the 2003 intervention.

Around 40 RAMSI advisors were placed into key positions in Government Ministries and exercised control over tasks such as budget preparation, while providing guidance to senior bureaucrats. As this work continued, the PPF spread out widely over Solomon Islands. The majority of the PPF have always been concentrated in and around Honiara, and are based at the RAMSI headquarters at the Guadalcanal Beach Resort (GBR). There was a RAMSI police presence along Guadalcanal's weather coast, as well as in all the provinces until 2010/2011. Outlying PPF positions were progressively withdrawn, so that by 2012 only three RSIPF police posts outside of Guadalcanal Province still retained RAMSI staff: the Provincial capitals of Gizo (Western Province) and Auki (Malaita Province), and the post of Lofung in the Shortland Islands (near Bougainville).

The PPF undertook executive or "in-line" policing, performing frontline duties alongside the RSIPF and providing "on the job" training. In addition, the PPF accompanied RSIPF into villages, and together they delivered presentations on citizens' rights under the law, and the role of police in upholding the law. Without RAMSI's presence and logistical support, RSIPF would not have been able to undertake these visits, which have been essential to developing public awareness of political, legal and human rights.

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Phase 3: Infrastructure development

While the PPF continued to work with communities, and to improve the skill base of RSIPF officers through middle management training (the higher levels of which are conducted in Australia), RAMSI developed an important new initiative with its building and renovation program. This Phase 3 concentration aimed to instil a greater sense of competency and professionalism among the RSIPF, along with pride in the uniform. Renovation and refurbishment of existing RSIPF buildings commenced around 2009, and new building projects were also initiated, the centrepiece of which is the Head Quarters at Rove. Demonstrating its commitment to generational renewal of the RSIPF, RAMSI funded the refurbishment of the Police Academy with purpose-built airconditioned classrooms, new desks and whiteboards. Infrastructure development has been on-going, and there is now new barracks-style accommodation for police recruits, including separate quarters for women. Many regional police commands benefitted from the building initiative, for example Western province now has a new Provincial HQ in Gizo, and older buildings have been upgraded.

In a country where there is very limited rental accommodation, the provision of police lodgings is significant because it allows for personnel with families to take transfers. New housing enables personnel rotation and career advancement, and provides a salary supplement as part of the employment 'package'. In theory, police housing enables RSIPF officers to operate outside of kinship obligations wherever they are stationed. Improvement to the facades of existing buildings highlights the importance placed by RAMSI on having clean stations in good repair, is good for police morale, and demonstrates to the community the state's commitment to the RSIPF.

Phase 4: Preparation for Transition

The *True Cost of Policing* report (2011) identified that two thirds of the cost of maintaining the RSIPF was being borne by RAMSI.¹² The report noted that the RSIPF faced considerable challenges in terms of financing, recruitment, logistics, basic equipment, buildings, fuel and training. Planning how to draw down without affecting the provision of service levels became RAMSI's aim in Phase 4.

An added complication is that public trust in RAMSI is higher than in the RSIPF. According to focus group results, RAMSI's capacity-building of the RSIPF has not led to a complete restoration of public confidence in the national police. Around half of the people in focus groups believed the RSIPF could not manage a deteriorating security situation if RAMSI were to depart.¹³

Preparation for transition has thus involved the PPF stepping back from executive policing roles and in-line duties, and adopting a supporting advisory role as the RSIPF assumes total responsibility for security. Control over curriculum at the RSIPF academy was devolved in 2006, but PPF advisors are still present in small numbers. Across all divisions of the RSIPF, the PPF assist in the strategic planning aspects of policing, for example, obtaining fuel or planning budgets, although occasionally they may be required for specific investigations, including homicide.

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Phase 5: Transition

RAMSI completed its work in the Pillars of Economic Governance and Machinery of Government in September 2013. The RAMSI military contingent also withdrew, leaving the PPF as the only armed force. The Australian High Commission has absorbed half of RAMSI's law and justice sector program as a bilateral responsibility, so policing support for the RSIPF is now the sole focus of the RAMSI mission. As RAMSI plans to transition out, the capacity of the RSIPF to deal with any eventuality will be tested. By September 2013 over 500 RSIPF had been trained in public order management, and RSIPF on operational duties were issued with capsicum spray.¹⁴ Discussions between RAMSI and SIG on the future shape of the RSIPF have also focussed on a program of limited rearmament for specific police units. Matters for deliberation are the types of weapons police should have, security for weapons issued, and conditions governing the use of firearms. Final disengagement has implications for the SIG: it will need to either find more money for policing, have the RSIPF live within its means, or come to some arrangement with aid donors for long-term bilateral policing support.

Conclusions

Phases 2-5 of RAMSI's police-building attempted to deepen RSIPF engagement, communication and collaboration with the community. At the same time RAMSI attempted to professionalise the standards of the RSIPF to forge a police force that was "less prone" to committing human rights abuses than it had been previously. There are various pressures on local police to uphold international standards of human rights protection, and international police are only one of many factors that help to induce a positive human rights culture.¹⁵ Civil society groups, both national and international, churches, media, aid donors and government all have an interest and a stake in building a human rights culture in which abuse is an anomaly, not an operational tactic. RAMSI has treated the tensions as a law and order issue, and in doing so separated governance from its social context. Integration of civil society organisations in peace-building occurred as an add-on to the main business of police-capacity building. As RAMSI adopts a support role, it is the RSIPF that must work with a variety of groups to continue to develop the country's human rights culture.

Generational change in the RSIPF has had to occur within the parameters of what is possible for a Pacific Island developing country where custom and religion are key influences on people's lives. Capacity-building of the RSIPF has allowed the state to become increasingly influential, but this has occurred alongside a high level of economic dependency which is unsustainable. This calls into question the legitimacy of constructing a model of policing that derives from Western social and institutional development, and which may not be appropriate for Melanesian society.

The presence of RAMSI and its PPF has led to improvements in terms of the professionalism of police, and in the structural ability of the state to protect the human rights of its population. RAMSI's police-building approach has led to growing public awareness of civil, political and human rights, and of the state's obligation to protect its people. Consciously adopting RtoP language in police-building

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would further reinforce the connection between regional assistance to stabilise situations of concern and the state's international protection obligations

Biographical note and Acknowledgements

Charles Hawksley is Senior Lecturer in Politics at University of Wollongong. **Nichole Georgeou** is Lecturer in Development Studies and Global Studies at Australian Catholic University, Strathfield. Charles and Nichole are completing a manuscript based on their research into police-building in Timor Leste, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea entitled *Police-building and the Responsibility to Protect: Civil Society, Gender and Human Rights Culture in Oceania*, to be published in 2015 in the Routledge series 'Global Politics and the Responsibility to Protect'.

Fieldwork for this research was made possible by funding from the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. The Centre acknowledges the funding support provided by Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia [DFAT Agreement 63684].

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