

Solomon Islands

A relative calm prevailed in the Solomon Islands during 2007, but the stable security situation belied a difficult operational reality for the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). The mission, while a largely welcome presence among the corruption-weary civilian population of the Solomon Islands, faced increasing opposition from local political actors who called for RAMSI's withdrawal and the restoration of Solomon Island sovereignty.

Land disputes on the main island of Guadalcanal during 1998 led to violence between indigenous residents and settlers hailing from the island of Malaitia—leaving hundreds dead and 20,000 Malaitians displaced. In subsequent years, Guadalcanal Liberation Front (GLF) militants and the opposing Malaitia Eagle Force (MEF) continued to terrorize the capital of Honiara by enlisting in the government's special constable units and using the cover of government uniforms to continue militia activities.

The situation prompted then–prime minister Sir Alan Kemakeza to request support from Australia and then from the Pacific Islands Forum. After notifying the UN Security Council, the initial RAMSI force of 2,000 Australian-led troops and police was deployed on 24 July 2003. Invited by the Solomon Island parliament, RAMSI was to restore stability as its primary objective, and then assist in the continued development of governance, rule-of-law, and economic structures to the point where the Solomon Islands could again assume control.

RAMSI's impact on security was immediate: GLF and MEF commanders surrendered by August 2003, and 400 (one-third) of the

Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

• Authorization Date	23 October 2000 (Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué)
• Start Date	July 2003
• Head of Mission	Tim George (Australia)
• Budget	\$107 million (October 2006– September 2007)
• Strength as of 30 September 2007	Troops: 214 Civilian Police: 306 Civilian Staff: 169

Royal Solomon Island Police (RSIP) were dismissed, with some facing prosecution. The Participating Police Force (PPF), the police arm of RAMSI, has worked with the remaining RSIP personnel to strengthen the capabilities of the police force and reestablish it as a vital national institution. Since 2003, the 315 PPF personnel, alongside the remaining RSIP personnel, have established seventeen police posts in all provinces, and have continued to train recruits at the RSIP police academy in Rove. The RSIP has incrementally taken on more policing responsibility, enabling the PPF in 2007 to refocus its efforts on further RSIP capacity building and sustainment rather than providing security as it had done in the past.

The quick restoration of stability similarly allowed RAMSI to reduce its military presence after its first year and concentrate efforts on justice sector development, economic growth, and governance reform. RAMSI has placed advisers among the Solomon Island government, some holding high-level positions in ministries

and courts, with the aim of assisting the government to assume its full responsibilities.

The nonsecurity dimension of RAMSI and its largely Australian composition have proven to be divisive, as the desire to autonomously rule their nation has grown among Solomon Island politicians. The tensions between RAMSI and its host reached a highpoint in 2006, when, following a spate of riots in April that required the redeployment of Australian defense forces, newly elected prime minister Manasseh Sogavare lauded the mission for its response but also announced a review of RAMSI and a possible limitation of its involvement in the government. Later in the year, Sogavare expelled Australia's top diplomat for alleged interference in the investigation of the April riots. Subsequently

the Sogavare government escalated its rhetoric concerning the withdrawal of RAMSI and dismissal of more RAMSI top staff.

However, RAMSI's critical role in the Solomon Islands was demonstrated when it provided the large majority of emergency disaster relief following the April 2007 tsunami, including a range of services far out of the national government's reach. With its presence proven crucial, RAMSI was approved for another twelve-month duration in July 2007. In December, the Solomon Islands' parliament adopted a vote of no confidence on Sogavare remaining as prime minister, a move that could pave the way for improved relations between the government and RAMSI, and one that might translate to tangible progress in the Islands stability.