

Solomon Islands

As 2010 progressed, so did the development of the Solomon Islands' capacity for economic sustainability, rule of law, and government accountability and service. Support for all three areas of development falls under the mandate of the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), and with this progress the support organization has effectively continued to transition from the initial focus of its mission, peacekeeping, to one of capacity building and playing an advisory role.

RAMSI was formed by the Pacific Island Forum and deployed on 24 July 2003 at the request of the government of the Solomon Islands as a regional response to a five-year conflict (1998–2003) between the Malatians and Guale ethnic groups. RAMSI successfully provided security and facilitated the surrender of criminal gangs supported by both groups engaged in the conflict. In addition to peacekeeping, RAMSI's mandate includes a tripartite mission of assisting the government: to establish and maintain law enforcement and an independent judiciary; to foster economic development; and to ensure methods of governance accountable to Solomon Islanders. RAMSI has worked with the government to improve the reputation of the Royal Police Force (RSIPF) through improved training and oversight, focusing on eliminating corruption, establishing accountability, and emphasizing professionalism. In 2009, the government and RAMSI established a new framework, emphasizing development in the provinces outside the Solomon Island capital of Honiara.

RAMSI has three branches, supervised by the special coordinator, Graeme Wilson. The Combined Task Force forms the military branch;

the Participating Police Force forms the civilian police force; and the government support branch is staffed with advisers for governance, justice, and economic development.

Background

Despite its presence being at the request of the Solomon Islands government, there have in the past been tensions between RAMSI and the government. The intentions of the heavily Australian RAMSI were called into question by the anti-RAMSI administration of prime minister Monnasseh Sogavare. Relations between the government and RAMSI quickly improved after a vote of “no confidence” in the Sogavare administration and the subsequent election of prime minister Derek Sikua in 2007. The election of the pro-RAMSI Sikua administration acted as a positive public referendum on the presence of RAMSI and its partnership with key government stakeholders.

Key Developments

In 2010, RAMSI focused on building the capacity of the Solomon Islands government to form and maintain its own legal and economic institutions, and RAMSI has thus established a more advisory level of support, providing guidance as the government increases its capacity for governance. Additionally, RAMSI Special Coordinator Wilson encouraged the people of the Solomon Islands to take advantage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which conducted its first hearings in March 2010. The commission is an attempt to enable Solomon Islanders to air their grievances and experiences of corruption and intimidation that were perpetrated

by members of the government prior to 2003. The commission's goals also include the resolution of ethnic tensions and their underlying roots in land-use issues.

On 4 August 2010, the Solomon Islands held national elections for only the second time since RAMSI began its mission. RAMSI and the RSIPF were largely successful in maintaining peace during this historically tumultuous event for Solomon Islanders. The recent elections were relatively tame, with 508 candidates competing for 50 parliamentary seats. On 24 August, a former foreign minister, Danny Philip, successfully led a political coalition to defeat the Democratic Party candidate, Steve Abana, in a tight election. Philip, the new prime minister, is supported by the political party of former prime minister Sogavare, a vocal critic of RAMSI, and Philip's election may have implications for the future relationship between RAMSI and the government.

RAMSI's reputation took a hit with the accidental shooting of a Solomon Islander by a RAMSI soldier on the outskirts of Honiara during the week of the elections. The shooting is

Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

Authorization Date	23 October 2000 (Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué)
Start Date	July 2003
Head of Mission	Graeme Wilson (Australia)
Budget	\$42.5 million (1 July 2010–30 June 2011)
Strength as of 30 September 2010	Troops: 150 Civilian Police: 305 Civilian Staff: 134

being investigated; it has, however, stoked anti-RAMSI sentiment, not only as a result of the shooting itself but also due to the immunity extended to RAMSI personnel in legal matters.

In 2011, undoubtedly the level of cooperation between the Philip government and RAMSI will have direct implications for the continued progress of the Solomon Islands' political and economic development.