

Solomon Islands

Increased stability in the Solomon Islands in 2011 has paved the way for greater focus on national capacity development and institutional strengthening. It has also prompted discussion on the eventual drawdown and transition of the Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). RAMSI underwent a turnover in leadership during 2011, with Special Coordinator Graeme Wilson handing over responsibility to Nicholas Coppel in April and Paul Osborne joining the mission as the new police commander for the Participating Police Force (PPF) in June.

Background

RAMSI was established in 2003 by the Pacific Islands Forum in response to a five-year conflict between the Malatians and the Guale ethnic groups in the Solomon Islands. The conflict had eroded law and order and given way to rampant corruption, intimidation, and violence. The Solomon Island government was

unable to function effectively and incapable of delivering basic services. In RAMSI's earliest days, the mission focused on security and stabilization, contributing to the surrender of armed criminal gangs supported by both the Malatians and the Guale.

The 2007 election of Manasseh Sogavare ushered in a period of tense relations between the Solomon Island government and RAMSI. The Sogavare government openly questioned the intentions of the RAMSI contingent and threatened to oust the mission. A 2007 vote of no confidence and the subsequent election of Derek Sikua helped to strengthen relations and demonstrated the broader support among Solomon Islanders for RAMSI's work. Elections in 2010 brought former foreign minister Danny Philip to power with a narrow majority.

As security and stability have improved and the Solomon Islands moves further away from crisis, the mission has turned its attention to long-term capacity building and institution strengthening. The 2009 partnership framework between the Solomon Island government and RAMSI identified three pillars of the mission's work: law and justice, economic governance and growth, and machinery of government. The framework established the overall goals for RAMSI, with specific targets and timelines for achievement, intended to facilitate a smooth transfer of activities to national actors in tandem with capacity building and institutional strengthening.

Key Developments

In 2011 RAMSI entered into a series of open discussions on its future role in the Solomon Islands and its eventual drawdown. The talks

Regional Assistance Mission in the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)

• Authorization Date	23 October 2000 (Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué)
• Start Date	July 2003
• Head of Mission	Nicholas Coppel (Australia)
• Force Commander	Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell Smith (Australia)
• Budget	\$42.5 million (1 October 2010–30 September 2011)
• Strength as of 30 September 2011	Civilian Police: 250

Box 3.6 Regional Organizations: ASEAN and the CSTO

Regional organizations have long been identified as important actors in peacekeeping and conflict resolution. The African Union, European Union, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), among others, all play critical roles in regional stability. In 2011, two regional organizations, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), took important though still untested steps forward in their efforts to respond to regional conflict.

In mid-2010, widespread protests erupted into large-scale violence in Kyrgyzstan, resulting in over seventy-five deaths and the resignation of the president. During the violence, Kyrgyzstan requested intervention from the CSTO; however, the organization stated that the unrest was an internal matter and limited its support to humanitarian assistance. The events pointed to weakness in the CSTO's ability to provide security guarantees within the region.

Though CSTO members had discussed creating a collective peacekeeping force for several years, these efforts gained momentum in late 2010, at least partially due to the failure to act during

the violence in Kyrgyzstan. In April 2011, the CSTO formed a collective peacekeeping force with approximately 4,200 peacekeepers. This force is complemented by an existing 17,000-strong CSTO rapid reaction force. The peacekeepers have yet to deploy, but the CSTO has agreed that they may be deployed within its member states and globally under the authorization of the UN Security Council. Further amendments to the CSTO's charter are anticipated, including efforts to develop the organization as the primary peacekeeping force in Central Asia.

In Southeast Asia, tensions flared along the border between Cambodia and Thailand in 2011, reigniting a long-standing territorial dispute between the two countries over the Preah Vihear temple. In 1962 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) awarded the temple to Cambodia, but both countries claim the territory around the temple. The dispute escalated in 2008 when Cambodia applied for and successfully registered the temple as a World Heritage site under the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Hostilities resumed in 2011, with the resulting

exchange of fire killing eight people and displacing thousands.

In response, Indonesia, acting in its capacity as the 2011 chair of ASEAN, invited ASEAN foreign ministers to meet informally on the conflict. It also offered to provide observers to monitor the cease-fire. When negotiations stalled, Cambodia brought the matter back to the ICJ, which ruled that troops from both countries should withdraw to allow Indonesian observers to monitor the border. Though Thailand initially rejected the decision of the Court, both countries agreed in September to comply with its decision.

The observers have yet to deploy and when they do, they will be deployed bilaterally by Indonesia, likely with a limited mandate. Still, this represents an important advancement in ASEAN's engagement in conflicts between its member states, demonstrating an increased willingness under the Indonesian chair to take an active role in member conflicts. However, Cambodia assumed the chairmanship in 2012, all but guaranteeing a substantially different role for ASEAN in this conflict.

included community leaders and chiefs, church leaders, students, teachers, and public servants who met to reflect on RAMSI's past achievements and share views on the future of the mission. During these discussions RAMSI stressed that any transition would occur within the parameters of the partnership framework and would take place in close consultation with the Solomon Island government.

RAMSI is currently funded through 2013, but stakeholders emphasize that any draw-down or withdrawal will occur gradually and that the mission will exist in some form for a number of years to come. RAMSI-contributing countries are already adapting their support in

light of increasing stability in the Solomon Islands. Australia, the main contributor to RAMSI, has reduced the size of its contingent, many of whom are currently deployed as reservists.¹ New Zealand has also emphasized the importance of a greater focus on the shift from security to development.²

A key precondition for a smooth transition process will be strengthened capacity of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). RAMSI has therefore given priority to training and mentoring the police, with expectations of long-term support.³ In addition, RAMSI will increasingly focus on handing over policing tasks to the RSIPF. In this vein,

it is envisioned that over the next two years RAMSI will gradually withdraw from the thirteen police posts where it maintains a presence in order to allow the RSIPF to take a leadership role. This transition began in August 2011 in Buala, Isabel province, where RAMSI PPF officers began to gradually scale down their operational presence and dedicate greater attention to mentoring. This was followed by a handover in October in Isuna, where the RSIPF, in response, pledged to increase its own policing services.

The transition is also predicated on the expanded presence of police officers throughout the Solomon Islands. To facilitate officer relocation and ensure that they have adequate housing in their new stations, in 2011 RAMSI initiated a project, funded by Australia and New Zealand, to build police houses throughout the country. RAMSI's Special Coordinator noted that the housing project plays an important role in police recruitment, heightening the image of the RSIPF as an "employer of choice."⁴

The 2010 edition of the independent annual People's Survey, released in April 2011,

showed continued support for RAMSI's work in the Solomon Islands, with 84 percent of respondents supporting the mission as a whole and 76 percent supporting the military component.⁵ The results also revealed continued concern about a return to conflict, with nearly half of respondents believing that law and order would break down if RAMSI were to depart immediately. In addition, 40 percent of respondents said they trusted the police, with 28 percent dissenting. These results underscore wide support for a continued role for RAMSI, particularly in the context of handover of policing responsibilities to national authorities.

Conclusion

As RAMSI moves forward with its assistance through the three pillars of the partnership framework, continued close consultation with the Solomon Island government will be critical. This is particularly important as discussions increasingly focus on transition and RAMSI's future role in the Solomon Islands.

Notes

1. Sean Dorney, "RAMSI in 'Transition' but No Word on Exit," *Australia Network News*, 12 July 2011, <http://australianetworknews.com/stories/201107/3268533.htm?desktop>.

2. "New Zealand Pushes for RAMSI to Shift to Development Work," *Solomon Island Times*, 16 June 2011, <http://www.solomontimes.com/news.aspx?nwID=6199>.

3. Stephen Smith, Australian minister of defense, interview with Dorothy Wickham and Koroi Hawkins, *One Television*, Solomon Islands, 13 July 2011, <http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/2011/07/13/minister-for-defence-interview-with-dorothy-wickham-and-koroi-hawkins-one-television-solomon-islands/>.

4. Thomas Perry, "More Police Houses Handed Over," RAMSI, 21 September 2011.

5. "People's Survey 2010," ANU Enterprise, April 2011.