

SOLOMON ISLANDS AS FAILED STATE (FOCUSED ON REGION'S SECURITY)

Tatiana TÖKÖLYOVÁ, Head of World Politics department at the University College of International and Public Relations in Prague, dept. in Bratislava where she gives lectures in International Relations. Since 2009 she is CEPSA Secretary General. In her current research she focuses on foreign policy and development assistance of Australia and New Zealand. She gives lectures at various European universities and her research papers are published at home and abroad. Since 2012 she is a member of the New Zealand Studies Association. E-mail: tokolyova.ba@gmail.com,

Summary: The main goal of the submitted paper is to analyse RAMSI mission to Solomon Islands concerning the region's security as a result of Australia's middle power engagement in the region. RAMSI represents a multilateral state-building regional intervention based on cooperation of a regional organisation (The Pacific Island Forum) and Australia as resulting from its middle power engagements.

Key words: failed state, RAMSI, middle power

Introduction

Pacific Islands countries have been addressed by huge development assistance given by various bilateral (e.g. Australia, New Zealand, France) and multilateral (e.g. UN) donors since being given their independence (1978 the Solomon Islands) but as proven in the recent development and through evaluation of the aid effectiveness in the region, the donors have not managed to overcome traditional approaches to the development aid and assistance (focused mainly on capacity building activities) interlinked with maladministration, weak political institutions (e.g. local political leadership) and corruption.

Unstable domestic political situation of the Solomon Islands (hereinafter referred to as SI) resulted in creation of the arc of instability in the close neighbourhood of Australia and thus jeopardising security in the region. The situation resulted in intervention the main goals of which were in favour not only of SI as the failed state but of Australia and the region, too. The main aim of this state-building operation was restoration of security, building of stable institutions as well as economic and legal reforms.

Roots of the 1998 -2003 crisis should be seen not only in the ethnic conflict,⁵⁵ which is many times given as the root cause, but also in the economic troubles born in the colonial past which brought successful plantation economy, and thus opened space for job demands.

The situation started to become critical in SI in 1998 when the civil war started. However, in June 2000 there was a coup, violations and break-down of normal life continued, accompanied by criminal acts. The situation culminated to the point when Australia started to be involved within its position in the region and to find

⁵⁵ This conflict was between the indigenous peoples of Guadalcanal and Malaita which are the two of the Solomon Islands.

the solution to the situation it helped in the negotiation process which resulted in October in conclusion of the Townsville Peace Agreement.

Despite all the will spent, implementation of the Treaty was not successful. The situation resulted into a long-term period of breaking of the law and order having a direct effect on the economy and naturally, on the life of the society itself. Concerning the worsening and long-lasting critical situation on the Islands, the Australian government started to talk about SI as “failed” state. Australia, being aware of great security and stability risk brought by these events to the Pacific region, put on an initiative to help in establishment of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) as a direct reaction to the Solomon Island’s Prime Minister’s request addressed to Australia for an assistance providing, and as a direct effect of its Middle power engagement influencing the security of the whole Pacific region.

Solomon Islands – a “failed” state and Australian engagement

As may be seen also in this context, Australia may be considered to be one of the best examples of the Middle power foreign policy as the country is over-active in international actions. Australia has developed into an actor closely cooperating not only with the superpower neighbour (USA) but also active within its region (not only with New Zealand). Its middle power position is underlined also by its peace-keeping activities and realisation of the right of self-determination of nations of the island countries in the region, as demonstrated by RAMSI in this analysis.

RAMSI should be seen as not only Australia’s action⁵⁶, however being its leading nation, but rather as a product of the regional cooperation. RAMSI, as a long-term project, and its status and mandate were approved not only by the Islands’ government but also by the Pacific Islands Forum, the only regional organisation involved in the action aimed at restoring the law and order on the Islands (besides other goals, see below). However, Australia may be considered as the main initiator of this mission, even though there are other partners involved, such as New Zealand, PNG, Tonga, and Fiji providing the staff and material support in the sense of multilateralism kept by Australia within its middle power policy. The initiative was built on the Biketawa declaration agreed in 2000 by the leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum as an expression of ideas of cooperation on the issues of regional security, aimed namely at coordination of responses to regional crisis.

Australia assigns the UN the most significant place and sees it as a basis for its peace-keeping engagement. In this area, Australia is significantly active in the South Pacific where it took on an active part in finding a political solution to the crisis in Fiji. After 11/9, Australian representatives realised that an increased attention should be paid to matters of state fragility in the region (Australia’s closest neighbourhood) as Australian security and foreign policy goals may not be reached from outside of the region (for more see Wesley 2002 and Hameiri 2007).

The character and mandate (justification) should be seen in the wider international context as going beyond the regional scope. This mission is directly interlinked with the so-called Anglo-American war against terrorism which uncovered various security risks, as the **“failed” states discourse** shows. Also in connection to the problems of SI, the problem of state fragility was discussed more and in more detail given the failed states’ openness for terrorist groups and their activities. Therefore, as stated by Dinnen, Australia felt this situation in SI as a real threat, as an “arc of

⁵⁶ However, it is Australia’s largest armed involvement in the area of the Southwest Pacific in the Post-war period.

instability” (2007. 257)

One of the most significant documents providing the reasons for the Australian engagement, is called “Our Failing Neighbour: Australia and the Future of Solomon Islands” prepared by ASPI states that SI is a failed state arguing “*Solomon Islands ...is a failing state. ...a slow-burning political and security crisis has paralysed the country’s capital, stifled its economy, disrupted government, discouraged aid donors, and inflicted suffering and hardship on its people. It has virtually ceased to function as an effective national entity*” (Wainwright, 2003, 3). The main fact cited as proof that the island state is failing is “*The fact that the Solomon Islands Government is bankrupt means that it is vulnerable to external influence.... This may involve.....schemes as dumping toxic waste; money laundering; providing a transit point for transnational crime and terrorism;....*”(ibid,16) thus opening the door for international crime (even terrorism) which is, in her opinion, the main argument for the Australian intervention and consequent mission led by Australia under consent of the Islands government.

Debates on the “**failed**” states (or called also “failing” states) are not evoked only by SI but they were brought into prominence after the 9/11 which have re-shaped ideas and practical engagement in state building operations. Failed state is considered to be failed by its mal-functional institutions, i.e. institutions which failed in providing general (not only political) goods to its citizens or as institutions with lack of good governance and political will (Hameiri, 2007, Clapton 2009).

However, there is no general and valid definition or classification of the failed state, generally it is accepted that any state which failed in performing its fundamental functions and role in all the aspects of society may be considered to be a failed state (see e.g. Zartman 1995), i.e. in failing in providing the key political goods starting with legitimate political institutions and bodies and ending with the essential physical security and safety.

Failure must be seen in the global aspect. As stated above, most of the Pacific Island Countries are the LDCs countries with problematic political, social, economic, environmental infrastructure rooted in their historical grounds; it was only under the current environment that they failed after being given their independence due to not having well-established economic and political elites. Therefore, such countries face lack of skilled and experienced political representation able to prevent from frequent elections (from national up to local level) caused by political clashes interlinked with corruption compounded by the lack of general education and health care. Recently also environmental and security risks have made the situation even more confounded, making the shift towards liberal democracies and well-working economies more than difficult (often humanitarian catastrophes trigger migration, crime, and other negative manifestations). Therefore, the problem of failed states must be seen as a security problem not only from the regional aspect, but globally. That is the main and constant premise of the Australian foreign policy in this matter as it is generally understood (based on the recent history) that the biggest threat to international security, peace and stability comes from the states which have, because of variety of reasons, failed in their functions.⁵⁷

In this context one should say that one of Australia’s roles as a middle power may be found in the development assistance activity focused on the Millennium goals in the region. The Australian involvement in the UN establishment may be considered

⁵⁷ See also the US 2002 National Strategy

as the beginning of its middle power era as it opens up room for Australia to build a stable international surrounding as well as by its peace-keeping mission, which RAMSI undoubtedly is. RAMSI should be stressed mainly because of the fact that, even though it is declared to be a multilateral state-building intervention, it is led and funded mainly by Australia. Analysis of RAMSI's effects is also important in relation to humanitarian intervention which includes prevention of state failure as states are increasingly willing to intervene to prevent humanitarian crises.

After it was given independence, SI fell into difficulties in all the areas of society. Considering the economy, based on the data acquired by the World Bank, SI is one of the less developed countries (LDCs) in the Pacific.⁵⁸ Based on Dinnen (2007, 256), the Islands failed in various aspects of modern statehood, namely in security issues and in matters of providing services to the citizens. Besides Dinnen, various commentators and experts named a group of serious problems and areas in which the states failed to work. These were: insufficient leadership, corruption, maladministration because of imported political institutions, and others (see Dinnen 2002, Bennett 2002).

RAMSI mission is based on the RAMSI Treaty, an agreement signed on 24 July 2003 with the Government of Solomon Islands and six member states of the Pacific Islands Forum (Australia⁵⁹, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa) with the main goals (as expressed in the first part of the Treaty) to “...assist the effective functioning of government, the restoration of confidence in law and order, and the economic recovery...”...“RECOGNISING the need for cooperation between members of the Pacific Islands Forum; NOTING that deteriorating law and order and security in Solomon Islands poses a threat to good governance and economic prosperity of Solomon Islands...” (The Treaty, preamble). In practice, it means deployment of forces (police and military) under the Assistance Mission (RAMSI). Since 2003, RAMSI has undergone 3 main stages covering three most significant areas as security (e.g. arrest of military leaders, gun collection, reforms of the police forces, etc.), politics and economy.

The core legislation for RAMSI mission is mainly the RAMSI Agreement of 2003, the Facilitation of International Assistance Act 2003 and The legal framework for the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Island (RAMSI) 2007 deriving its mandate from the Biketawa Declaration. Based on Article 1 of the Treaty, all the above participating parties are denoted as assisting parties providing participating police forces and armed forces with the Treaty providing a rather detailed scope of the mission – starting with the mandate and closing with practical issues, such as uniforms, accommodation but also jurisdiction and claims. In order to give the RAMSI Treaty a legal affect, it was enacted by the National Parliament of SI in 2003 providing that the Islands requested the international assistance. In 2009, consequently, there was released a document on developing strategies to be applied (The Partnership Framework Between Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI) while providing also the main areas of RAMSI's activities with the set main goals (areas from law and justice to economic growth and governance). These main goals should be achieved via main pillars, such as capacity building, anti-corruption measures, and gender equality measures (The Partnership Framework Between Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI, 2009. 2, 10, 51, 64).

Effectiveness of RAMSI on the Solomon Islands and the region

⁵⁸ <http://data.worldbank.org/country/solomon-islands>

⁵⁹ At first, in 2003 the Australian government was strictly against the Australian mission to the Islands. Just after development in Iraq and the Australian participation there, the position was changes in favour of the action.

RAMSI may be seen as a significant milestone in the Australian foreign policy, i.e. as a shift from non-intervention to a cooperative intervention (that means a shift from respect of state sovereignty in all cases into intervention to prevent a state instability or even failure; as may be seen also in Australian engagement also in PNG, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Nauru).

Joanne Wallis in the article "A 'helpem fren' in need...Evaluating the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands" (Wallis, 2006) assess both stages of the intervention focused on the prevention of state failure. Such stages were a short-term (preventive) one and a long-term (reconstructive) one. Therefore, in her analysis she gives attention to the preventive effectiveness and a reconstructive effectiveness of RAMSI. I have found this analysis to be comprehensive and thorough enough as it gives global analysis of the effectiveness of the mission. Wallis states that it is clear that RAMSI fulfilled its preventive goals and thus may be seen as effective from the short term aspect. Considering the reconstructive effectiveness, the process is not closed yet and is facing many challenges.

Wallis bases her evaluation of the mission's effectiveness on theories and approaches of the failing states and external state building intervention. The core of the evaluation poses questions whether RAMSI managed to deal with the instability in the Islands and thus in the region (where the Islands could be seen as the biggest security risk). The main departure point is that classification of SI as a failing state was correct. The assessment of the "preventive effectiveness" maybe be conducted by analysing the following criteria: whether the intervention ended the fighting, whether law and order and the economy have been restored, whether the roots of the conflict were understood, was it more than a military response, and finally whether the mission was accepted by population with given visions to the future (Wallis, 2006. 7-10). Having answered all the points above, it is clear that RAMSI has fulfilled its preventive goals and thus may be claimed to be effective from the aspect of short-term goals (the preventive ones).

The situation is rather different when evaluating the mission's long-term effectiveness, i.e. effectiveness of the reconstruction goals of the missions. However, the mission has not finished yet, some points (given again via the specified questions) may be seen non-fulfilled right now because answering the long-term goals' effectiveness, the initial question of "when the intervention is effective" must be answered. The main RAMSI's goal was to prevent SI from becoming a failed state. This goal was fulfilled but is this permanent or long-term achievement that will remain after closing of the mission? Thus, the reconstructive effectiveness test questions as posed by Wallis are mainly in the area of politics: analysis of the achievement of liberal democracy, legitimating of the government, engagement of local leadership, building of civic society (Wallis, 2006. 12-17). The most critical point seems to be to improve the machinery of government and accountability and transparency and build up anti-corruption institutions (Wallis, 2006. 17).

To conclude it must be said that RAMSI has proved its efficiency as the SI is able to guarantee law and order and is able to provide its citizens with more government services than before. However, the mission proved also that any external state building mission must comprise also a nation building level. RAMSI has proved that it was the most suitable way how to deal with the problems of SI and the failures identified (e.g. in cooperation with the non-state segments of the society when RAMSI's state-centred approach resulted in non-participation of all the spheres of the society) can be solved as it is an on-going project.

As noted by Hameiri, RAMSI lacks a comprehensive and systematic understanding of the development and dimensions of state power in SI as “*State capacity in Solomon Islands must be understood in relation to the political and social relationships that underpin state power and governance, rather than understood in relation to an external “best practice” standard*” (Hameiri, 2007, p. 424). Indeed, RAMSI showed the importance of trans-regional cooperation as global security was proved a non-regional issue.

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