Self-Determination in Oceania: New Roles for US, Japanese and Asian Power?

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The vast Pacific Islands region, or Oceania, has long been considered an "American lake," its numerous small island states and territories heavily dependent on the United States and its western allies, particularly Australia, New Zealand, and France, for development assistance, trade, and security. However, economic and political ties with Asian states have become increasingly important in recent decades. Japan has been active in Oceania since the 1980s, motivated by its long-term interests in natural resources, particularly fisheries, as well as cognizant of the "burden sharing" obligations of its strategic alliance with the United States. Japan is now the major aid donor to the region as a whole, and since 1997 has hosted regular, high-profile summit meetings with Pacific Island leaders. The substantial increase in aid announced by Prime Minister Koizumi at the most recent of these meetings, held in Okinawa in May 2006, was in part a response to mounting political instability in Oceania. It was also an attempt to counter China's growing interest in the region, signaled by Beijing's summit meeting with island leaders in Fiji the previous month, as well as Taiwan's ongoing and aggressive use of "dollar diplomacy" to win support from island states. This article discusses some key issues shaping the political environment in which this escalating strategic competition is taking place.

Map of the Pacific Islands

Generations of students have viewed political developments in Oceania through the lens of national self-determination. An influential account in this genre is David Robie's *Blood on Their Banner: Nationalist Struggles in the South Pacific,* first published in 1989. Challenging media coverage informed by the trope of Paradise, the book explored the 'ugly side of Oceania' through a survey of violent conflicts in East Timor, West Papua, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Palau, Vanuatu, and Fiji. For Robie, these events reflected the inevitable confrontation between colonialism and the liberation movements it provoked, 'a quest for national sovereignty that takes into account the legacy of more than two centuries of colonialism' (Robie 1989: 23). Here Pacific peoples are portrayed as latecomers in a global grand narrative of anticolonial struggle, complete with references to Che Guevara, blood sacrifice, and nationalist banners symbolizing 'the dawn of hope and a new future' (Robie 1989: 23).

The conceptual framework Robie used to make sense of the events of the 1980s appears distinctly problematic today. Even if there was a time when 'nationalist aspirations' defined regional politics, then that moment has well and truly passed. Indeed, one of the case studies in *Blood on their Banner* deals with the 1987 coups in Fiji, which had achieved national sovereignty seventeen years before. Robie portrays the actions of Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka and the Taukei movement against a democratically elected government as throwbacks to 'self-absorbed ethnocentric isolation' and major setbacks for progressive nationalism in the Pacific generally (Robie 1989: 286). The real problem for Robie is the absence of an 'obvious colonial villain' in this particular drama (Robson 1995: 2). His explanatory paradigm works best when dealing with the naked power of French colonialism in New Caledonia and French Polynesia, or Indonesian aggression in East Timor and West Papua, but falters in the face of the ambiguities of the colonial legacy in Fiji. Essentially this is a narrative that seeks salvation for oppressed peoples in a global process of decolonization and, at least by implication, vigorous post-colonial projects of 'modernization' and 'development'.

The optimism of the early years of self-government has given way to a persistent discourse of crisis, state failure and collapse in some parts of Oceania. By early 2003, after 25 years of independence, state institutions in the Solomon Islands had effectively ceased to function, and today the country remains under the control of an Australian-led intervention force, the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Writing in 2005 as Papua New Guinea marked three decades of sovereign statehood, University of Papua New Guinea professor of politics Allan Patience described debauched political institutions, collapsed essential services, gratuitous human rights violations, and 'thousands of people suffering needlessly and dying prematurely' (Patience 2005: 1-2). Meanwhile, senior Australian journalist Graeme Dobelle speculated that 'it would take only two or three years of bad luck and bad leadership' to push Vanuatu into a similar downward spiral towards state collapse more than 25 years after the colonizers withdrew (Dobelle 2005: 8). In December 2006, Fiji experienced its fourth coup in twenty years when the elected government of Laisenia Qarase was ousted by head of the armed forces Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama—who had facilitated Qarase's rise to power after George Speight's so-called civilian coup of May 2000 (Field et al. 2005; Pareti 2007).

Commodore Bainimarama, Fiji

The problem with Robie's approach is not necessarily its emphasis on colonialism. If anything he underestimates colonialism's ability to redefine lifestyles and aspirations for at least some of the colonized, as well as its enduring legacy of political and economic institutions that ostensibly facilitate the achievement of

new values. What is lacking is a thorough interrogation of the ongoing process of decolonization in the region, particularly the key concepts of 'nation' and 'sovereignty' that lie at its center. The difficulties associated with achieving and sustaining 'national sovereignty,' an ideal with a distinctly western genealogy, in a largely non-western social, economic, and political environment are clearly enormous. These difficulties, compounded by an increasingly intrusive and demanding international environment, provide the essential context for understanding the 'ugly side of Oceania' today.

Decolonizing Oceania

Decolonization was undoubtedly 'one of the most important political developments in the twentieth century,' but it was not driven by the noble principle of self-determination as Robie and others would like to believe (Duara 2004: 1). Indeed, the idea of self-determination was recently described by Marc Weller as a 'legitimizing myth' for the international system and a 'trap' for those seeking to free themselves from oppression and exploitation (Weller 2005).

In a celebrated resolution in December 1960 (1514 XV), the United Nations General Assembly condemned colonialism in no uncertain terms before declaring, 'All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development' (United Nations 1960). This is an extraordinarily bold statement, because an untrammeled right to self-determination conflicts with key provisions in international law designed to protect the territorial integrity of existing states (Emerson 1960: 295-328). In fact those who voted for this resolution were well aware of the radical nature of what they proposed—and took explicit steps elsewhere in the resolution and in subsequent international practice to limit its impact. As a legal right, self-determination is largely confined to specific colonial populations and territories designated as non–self-governing or trust territories by the United Nations after World War II. Those privileged entities, whose names are inscribed on a master list, have a one-off opportunity to choose a new political status, and independent statehood has always been the preferred outcome (Weller 2005: 10).

Nevertheless, the norms of self-determination established by the United Nations played an important role in the process of decolonization in Oceania by putting significant pressure on the colonial powers to move their colonies towards self-government. New Zealand, for example, decided early on to rid itself of the colonial taint, and worked hard to decolonize Western Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau as soon as possible and in ways that would win kudos at the General Assembly. By the early 1970s, Australia had abandoned its long-term 'uniform development' plans for Papua New Guinea in the face of international pressure to grant independence sooner rather than later.

The self-determination regime was also significant because it discriminated among the colonized peoples of the Pacific. Only those colonies listed as non-self-governing or trust territories were subject to the scrutiny of what became known as the Committee of Twenty-Four, the UN body established in 1961 to monitor the decolonization process. By that time France had removed New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Wallis and Futuna from the United Nations list, on the grounds that the peoples of those territories had voted in favor of a new constitution for the Fifth Republic in 1958. [1] Similarly, the United States argued successfully that the 1959 vote on statehood for Hawai`i constituted a valid act of self-determination, and that there was no further need to report to the United Nations on political developments in that key Pacific territory. [2]

Status differences produced contrasting outcomes for East Timor and West Papua, both colonies of European powers forcibly taken over by Indonesia. The United Nations strongly condemned the 1975 invasion of East Timor shortly before it achieved independence from Portugal. Its eventual emergence to independence under UN auspices in 2002 was justified with reference to a pre-existing right to self-determination. The takeover of disputed West Papua, on the other hand, came as the result of a 1960 agreement between Indonesia and the Netherlands, the departing colonial power, and brokered by the United States. [3] The United Nations endorsed the 1969 Act of Free Choice in the territory as an appropriate expression of local wishes, even though Indonesia had been in complete control there for nearly a decade and only a select group of Papuan leaders were 'consulted' about the territory's future (Saltford 2002). As a result, the people of West Papua have no further recourse to the decolonization provisions of the United Nations. Still other indigenous peoples, notably in Australia and New Zealand, fell completely outside of the decolonization rubric, because they happened to live in settler-dominated colonies that had achieved political independence from Great Britain earlier in the century.

Despite a commitment to bring a 'speedy and unconditional end [to] colonialism in all its forms and manifestations', the United Nations ignored some of the peoples in Oceania most affected by external influences (United Nations 1960). In any event, a narrow focus on international law distracts attention from the *realpolitik* shaping the history of decolonization in Oceania. The single most important factor determining whether a particular island entity would get full sovereign independence, remain dependent, or enter into a relationship of 'free association,' was probably the interests of the colonial power. In a comprehensive survey of Pacific patterns of decolonization, Stewart Firth argued convincingly that

> Generally, the greater the strategic value of an island territory, the less likely that territory has been to proceed to sovereign status. The map of Pacific Islands sovereignty has been drawn largely according to the strategic needs of external states (Firth 1989: 75-76).

This proposition helps explain the disposition of the Pacific territories controlled by the United States and France, which together account for many of the entities that have not achieved sovereign statehood, or whose independence is qualified by ongoing legal ties to the metropolitan power. Status negotiations in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands were heavily influenced by America's military interests in particular parts of Micronesia, and an uncompromising commitment to prevent potentially hostile powers from establishing strategic relationships with emerging island entities. France's Pacific interests centered around its nuclear testing facility at Mururoa in French Polynesia, and in maintaining a network of territories to project French cultural, economic, political, and military power around the globe.

If full sovereign independence was simply not an option for the Pacific territories administered by the United States and France, it was the only option in other parts of the region. After reassessing its own interests in alternatives, Australia declared in 1969 that full independence was the only acceptable outcome for Papua New Guinea. Great Britain decided unilaterally to withdraw from the region, leaving only the terms and timing of independence to be negotiated with the colonized in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Gilbert and Ellice Islands (which split into Kiribati and Tuvalu). New Zealand was interested in severing its colonial relationships as well, but proposed a treaty of friendship with Western Samoa and free association arrangements with Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau in recognition of its ongoing economic and social entanglements with these small entities.

Making States and Nations in Oceania

Restrictions imposed by the United Nations, together with the continuing dominance of colonial interests, resulted in the uneven application of the principle of self-determination in Oceania. Even more significant in the longer term was the central role of alien institutions, notably the western-style nation-state, in the

decolonization process.

The movement for decolonization was premised on the notion that colonized peoples should be liberated from the racism and exploitation of European imperialism. Although most indigenous societies had been profoundly disorganized by colonialism, some leaders, including India's Mahatma Gandhi, advocated the restoration of damaged cultural practices and institutions in the context of increasing global interdependence. For other intellectuals, like Frantz Fanon, the only way to escape the economic, cultural, and psychological grip of colonialism was to create an entirely new path, one that recognized that the circumstances—and opportunities—facing indigenous peoples had changed radically since colonization began (Kelly and Kaplan 2004: 145-150). In general, the process of decolonization was neither rehabilitative nor particularly innovative. Instead, the norms that guided this global movement were essentially imitative of European models of economic and political development.

The fact that the process of decolonization relied on western-style institutions is perhaps not surprising. After all, it was supervised by the United Nations, itself created by the dominant powers to manage and reinforce an international system composed of just such entities. And the leaders of anti-colonial movements were often members of western-educated elites already entrenched in western systems of administration (Duara 2004: 4-5). Nevertheless, it is difficult to overstate the enormity of this move. What was advocated, in effect, was the massive transformation of colonized societies—containing most of the population of the planet—in the political image of a few dominant members of the international system.

Statebuilding in Oceania has involved considerable challenges. Although some of the requisite infrastructure was already in place in the form of the colonial state, these were often neglected, rudimentary structures with limited resources and incomplete territorial reach, sometimes existing uneasily alongside indigenous institutions that had persisted through the colonial era. Furthermore, the process occurs largely within colonial entities whose boundaries were established with scant regard for the traditional cultural and political features of Oceania. [4] This was the case even in culturally homogenous and politically centralized Polynesia, where only Tonga stands as a possible exception. The Cook Islands, for example, contained several culturally distinct island groups scattered over thousands of square kilometers of ocean. The neighboring colonial entity now known as French Polynesia brought together no less than six culturally distinct archipelagos, none of which constituted a single traditional polity.

In the larger and much more culturally diverse islands to the west, colonial boundaries were almost completely arbitrary. The huge island of New Guinea was divided down the middle by the Dutch, who chose a line of longitude—141 degrees East—to define the eastern extent of their claim. The eastern portion of the island was split horizontally into German New Guinea and British Papua—only to be reunited later as Papua New Guinea under Australian rule. The boundary between German (later Australian) New Guinea and the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, defined at the 1899 three-power conference in Berlin, arbitrarily bisected the narrow straits between Bougainville and the Shortland Islands (van der Veur 1966). Similarly, the boundaries organizing the thousands of scattered islands further east and south into colonial entities called the New Hebrides (later renamed Vanuatu), New Caledonia, and Fiji could easily have fallen quite differently under even slightly altered historical circumstances.

Much the same could be said for the administrative nets cast by the colonial powers over the diffuse scattering of mostly tiny islands north of the equator. Some that happened to attract the attention of the Spanish were later passed on as a territorial package to German, Japanese, and American rulers (Hezel 1995). Others were collected one-by-one or in groups by the British, to be organized and reorganized later for administrative convenience. Thus the administrative unit that had earlier brought together the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, which were themselves culturally very different, expanded 'umbrella-like' after 1916 to include phosphate-rich Ocean Island (Banaba), the Line Islands, Tokelau (later transferred to New Zealand), and the Phoenix Islands. Containing a total land area of less than a thousand square kilometers, this unwieldy colonial entity sprawled over more than four million square kilometers of ocean (Macdonald 1982: vi).

It is hardly surprising, then, that a strong sense of nationhood has been difficult to achieve in many parts of Oceania. This is particularly the case in places like Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, where extreme cultural and linguistic fragmentation defies the creation of common identities, and in territories that have attracted significant numbers of permanent settlers from Europe or Asia. [5] It is not easy to foster a sense of solidarity across the profound cultural, economic, and religious divide between indigenous Fijians and the descendants of migrant workers from India, who now represent more than 40 percent of the population of Fiji. Nor is it easy to persuade fragmented indigenous Kanak tribal groups that they share a national identity with each other, let alone the settlers of European, Asian, and Polynesian origin who have been numerically and economically dominant in New Caledonia for many decades. But even in culturally homogenous places like Samoa, traditional political life is focused at the local level, and the assertion of centralized state power is still regarded with suspicion.

In the previously colonized world, the perceived benefits of statehood may well be outweighed by the costs. These costs may be economic, for as Christopher Clapham points out, 'states, with their extensive hierarchies and permanent employees are expensive to maintain,' and the necessary resources have to be extracted from citizens in the form of taxes (Clapham 2003: 28). Or they might be social, as the state meets resistance from clan or tribal collectivities grounded in subsistence-based economies and animated by quite different cultural and political values. Historically the process of state-making, of accumulating power in the hands of a central administrative apparatus, has almost always involved coercion and collective violence. This was certainly the case with the 'organized crime' of state formation in Western Europe, which Charles Tilly notes 'cost tremendously in death, suffering, loss of rights, and unwilling surrender of land, goods and labor' (Tilly 1975: 71, 1985: 169-191).

State Success and State Failure in Oceania

Given these rather inauspicious circumstances, the state-making project in Oceania has been remarkably successful. Most of the region's island entities have remained politically stable over the last four decades. Not only has conflict been the exception rather than the rule, but where upheavals have occurred, for example in New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and Fiji, they have usually been relatively short-lived. Even if recent crises in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands have proved much more costly in human and material terms, they pale in comparison to the conflicts that characterize many other parts of the previously colonized world (Henderson and Watson 2005).

Concerns about state performance in Oceania are often framed in terms of putative measures of what should or could have been achieved. In particular, commentators have tended to focus on the apparent lack of economic growth in the region despite large transfers of development assistance, a phenomenon labeled a 'Pacific paradox' by the Word Bank. For example, Australian economist Helen Hughes argues that Pacific governments are 'failing their people' by spending aid funds on consumption rather than investment, and that lack of economic growth 'means serious trouble' down the road, especially in places where population growth is rapid (Hughes 2003: 1).

Economic issues are clearly among the factors associated with state instability in the Pacific. But the situation is by no means as straightforward as Hughes suggests, and there is not necessarily a direct and positive relationship between state strength and economic development. Indeed, some types of modern economic activity have been so disruptive, particularly of local communities, as to weaken rather than enhance state capacity. This is particularly the case

with the mining and logging industries in the Pacific.

Large-scale mining projects in Papua New Guinea have had massive impacts on local communities often ill-equipped to deal with new demands on land and labor, the large influx of outsiders, and the rapid transformation of the cultural and physical environment. Even the injection of substantial amounts of money in the form of wages, compensation, or rent has proved traumatic for societies geared to the production and distribution of quite different forms of wealth. Indeed, it was just such concerns that threw into turmoil village communities in the vicinity of the giant Panguna copper and gold mine in the late 1980s, and sparked what became known as the Bougainville crisis. Despite the deployment of all of the political and military resources at its disposal, the Papua New Guinea state was unable to impose its will in a rebellious province and retain control of a key economic asset (see, e.g Dorney 1998; Regan 1998).

Panguna mine, center of
the Bougainville crisis,
Papua New Guinea

Logging has also had corrosive effects on state power, particularly in Solomon Islands. Like mining, the logging industry in the Pacific is largely foreign-owned and -controlled, extracts natural resources with minimum in-country processing, and causes massive and irreparable environmental damage. Unlike subsurface minerals, the state has no legal claim to forestry resources, and state revenue streams from logging have been erratic at best—or captured for personal and political gain by high-level state operatives. Furthermore, while the state is fully aware of and complicit in mining industry practices, logging companies have generally managed to circumvent state attempts to regulate the industry. When the logging company moves on, it typically leaves behind little more than a denuded ecosystem, a few rough haulage roads, and a rural community in disarray (see, e.g. Bennett 2000).

All modern development activity is by its very nature disruptive of traditional cultural and economic practices. In theory, one of the primary functions of the modern state is to manage this process of change and deal with any conflicts associated with it. Weak states are often simply unable to do this and, as in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, the results can be devastating. The sprawling squatter communities found on the outskirts of many Pacific towns today, and a swelling army of unemployed youth, are symptoms of a development process that can as easily produce poverty and insecurity, as affluence and stability.

Perhaps the most important factor impacting the success or failure of state building efforts in Oceania is the indigenous basis for statehood. In general, those places with hierarchical traditional political systems, a history of centralized forms of organization, and culturally homogenous populations have weathered the traumas of state building better than places lacking these attributes. In Samoa and Tonga modern political institutions have been grafted onto traditional ones and, although certainly not without their problems, these states have been relatively stable for decades. [6] On the other hand, the thousands of small, autonomous, and culturally distinct societies thrown together to form Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu have provided the most daunting conditions for would-be state builders. These are communities that survived for many thousands of years without anything resembling a state. These are also places that were changed but hardly transformed during a colonial interlude that was both brief (effectively less than 30 years for the highlands of Papua New Guinea) and superficial. As Sinclair Dinnen puts it, in each of these countries 'the entanglements of pre-colonial and colonial forces is implicated deeply in the challenges of the post-colonial present' (Dinnen 2004a: 72).

The most important variables in statebuilding activities in the Pacific are historical and cultural, rather than technical or economic. The challenges have been most acute in entities like Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, where thousands of small, vibrant, and largely autonomous societies resist the imposition of modern state institutions. The problem with these Melanesian states is not so much that they are prone to falling apart—or 'failing'—but rather that they have never really been put together (Finin and Wesley-Smith 2001: 4).

Recolonizing Oceania

With a global legacy of economic and political institutions cast in its own image, it is tempting to see decolonization as marking the triumph of imperialism rather than its demise. Furthermore, the new nation-states joined an international system that has increasingly restricted the possibilities of genuine self-determination. As Kelly and Kaplan put it, the former colonies entered "a new world order already tooled for purposes at best different than the aims of the anti-colonial movement, and at times clearly obstructive of them" (Kelly and Kaplan 2004, 140).

The norms and expectations associated with statehood have changed significantly since Pacific entities achieved independence, as has the nature of external involvement in their affairs. Readiness for independent statehood, however defined, was clearly not the most important variable influencing whether or not a particular territory would achieve sovereignty. [7] However, in the early years of independence, strategic interests framed by Cold War concerns motivated extensive efforts on the part of regional powers to support island states. These efforts often took the form of large annual transfers of 'development assistance', and by the early 1980s, per capita aid flows to Pacific Islands nations were among the highest in the world. Since the primary objective of this assistance was to keep the new island leaders 'on side' in the struggle to exclude the Soviet Union and its surrogates from the region, these generous transfers came with few conditions attached.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, and the temporary retreat of the security imperative in regional affairs, the emphasis shifted away from largely unconditional transfers of aid, to what became known as the 'reform agenda'. The intention here was to use aid conditionality to encourage market-led

economic growth, trade liberalization, and 'good governance' practices. This represented a shift from an emphasis on state maintenance to an apparent determination to engineer the transformation of island economies and societies. It is not clear how these small and vulnerable economies would fare in the hard-nosed world of free trade (Kelsey 2004). But it is clear that the ongoing reform agenda requires structural adjustments that are by their very nature disruptive of the traditional economic and land use patterns that have guaranteed the social integrity and subsistence security of island societies for centuries. Ironically, the reforms also insist on public sector downsizing that probably makes island states even less capable of managing large-scale change, and keeping a lid on conflicts when they emerge. Changes that ostensibly aim to make weak states stronger may actually end up weakening them even more.

Australia's policy of 'cooperative intervention' announced in June 2003 marked the return of security considerations to prominence in regional politics, this time driven by concerns about global terrorism. The new policy represented a further and dramatic shift in the expectations attached to statehood in Oceania, and signaled a new emphasis on 'hands-on' involvement in the internal affairs of Pacific island states (Fry 2005). The change was justified with reference to the 'failed state' paradigm that has become prominent in international relations discourse in recent times.

The term 'failed state' first emerged to describe the major human rights and humanitarian disasters of the 1990s in places like Somalia, Haiti, Cambodia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. These situations attracted the attention of scholars and policy makers because of the enormous suffering involved, as well as the massive international interventions they provoked. Indeed, these developments have given considerable impetus to the idea that the international community has a responsibility to protect populations from serious harm when sovereign states are unwilling or unable to do so (ICISS 2001; Held 2003).

Perhaps more important, these crises raised the specter of the imminent breakdown of a state-centered global order that had been relatively stable in the Cold War era (see e.g. Milliken 2003; Rotberg 2004). This doomsday idea was popularized by journalist Robert Kaplan in an article called 'The Coming Anarchy,' in which he predicted the withering away of the modern nation-state in favor of tribal domains 'city-states, shanty-states, and nebulous and anarchic regionalisms' (Kaplan 1994: 24). Since the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, questions of 'failed states' and what to do about them have become firmly linked to concerns about terrorism and the deployment of weapons of mass destruction. The problem is not only that the decline or collapse of states such as Afghanistan, Angola, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Somalia, Burundi or Liberia threatens the welfare of the citizens involved. It is also that failing and failed states are assumed to be vulnerable to the overtures of a variety of nonstate actors, including transnational criminals. These elements could, the argument goes, threaten the economic, security, or political interests of other states (Rotberg 2002).

These ideas were an important part of the justification for the Australian-led military intervention into the Solomon Islands in July 2003. An influential report released just before the launch of the RAMSI initiative argued that the situation in the Solomon Islands engaged Australia's 'most enduring strategic imperatives,' not least because it could become a 'petri dish for transnational threats' including drug and people smuggling, gun-running, and terrorism. Continuing its epidemiological analogy, the report suggested that such problems could 'prove contagious to other countries in the region' (APSI 2003: 3, 13-14).

Australian soldiers, Solomon Islands

It is arguable whether this renewed emphasis on regional security is justified by the current situation in the islands. Apart from money laundering activities associated with some offshore banking facilities, transnational criminal activity in the Pacific is relatively minor compared to other regions of the world. There is no evidence of international terrorist cells becoming established anywhere in the islands region (see e.g., Rolfe 2004). Arguments that emphasize these security considerations are necessarily based on future possibilities, and policies justified in these terms must be regarded as preemptive in nature.

The fact that vital security considerations have been invoked is highly significant for a number of reasons. It gives the Pacific policies of Australia, and to a lesser extent, New Zealand, a domestic priority that they would not otherwise have, and has led to significant increases in aid and other resources directed towards the region. Perhaps more important, it makes it easier to justify the idea of 'hands-on' or direct intervention in the domestic affairs of island nations than would otherwise be the case. It is clear, for example, that the situation in Papua New Guinea looms large for Australian analysts and policymakers (Windybank 2003; Windybank and Manning 2003). An agreement completed in late 2004 provided for the deployment of 300 Australian police and public servants to take up line positions in the Papua New Guinea bureaucracy (Dinnen 2004b: 8-9; Patience 2005). [8]

These sorts of interventions raise tricky issues regarding the internationally recognized sovereignty of Pacific states (Ottaway and Lacina 2003). Indeed, there are a growing number of individuals and groups who see recent developments in terms of an ongoing process of 'recolonization' (Underwood 2004; Kelsey 2004). Australia has worked hard to avoid accusations of neocolonialism in Solomons and Papua New Guinea by emphasizing that these are invited or negotiated solutions to internal problems, and by building regional support for or involvement in these actions. [9] But there may well be future situations in which it is difficult to determine exactly who in a conflict-ridden 'failed' or 'failing' state is authorized to invite such involvement. And there is likely to be increasing resistance on the part of island leaders and observers to multilateral initiatives that appear to reflect the agendas and aspirations of metropolitan, rather than island, members of regional communities.

State Rehabilitation and Reconstruction

Increasing concern about 'failed' and 'failing' states raises difficult questions about state rehabilitation or state reconstruction, especially in Pacific places where these institutional structures have never been particularly effective. In Solomon Islands, for example, there are obvious dangers associated with

attempting to resuscitate an institutional order that by most measures did not perform very well in the twenty-two years prior to its virtual collapse in mid-2000 (Hegarty, May et al. 2004). The problem is not necessarily with the post-conflict phase of intervention, and RAMSI successfully restored some semblance of law and order in Solomon Islands within six months of its arrival.

Much more problematic is the second and critical phase, which for the Solomons involves 'working with Solomon Islanders to rebuild their political and security institutions, to ensure effective long-term service delivery, functioning democratic processes and a revived economy' (Wainwright 2003: 495). The issue here is not really the availability of resources or administrative expertise. Institutional structures can be readily designed by consultants and established or reestablished with the help of skilled and experienced expatriates. Capacity-building efforts can also yield promising results, at least in the short term. What is much more difficult for outsiders (or insiders for that matter) to change is the wider political culture in which western-style state institutions must operate over the longer term. Traditional economic formations, ideologies, and identities remain resilient in most of the Pacific places considered likely candidates for state failure. Modern ideas about society and government are highly unlikely to be internalized any time soon.

Protester, Solomon Islands

The idea of somehow engineering the wholesale transformation of the central values and practices of Oceanic societies to fit the mold of western-style administration is deeply troubling—especially if this is essentially to further the security interests of external powers. Such 'development' efforts may even have helped create the unstable conditions we now confront in places like Solomon Islands or Papua New Guinea. On the other hand, some state-like structures of organization and control are undoubtedly necessary, if only to provide the sorts of educational and health services that most Pacific Islanders now find valuable.

To have any measure of success, statebuilding activities will have to work with existing institutions and ideologies of governance. They will also require much time, modest expectations, and perhaps even a willingness to redraw political boundaries. Above all, these are tasks that can only be accomplished by islanders themselves. The alternative may be continuing external control, perhaps through some revived form of international trusteeship or system of mandates. According to former Guam Congressman Robert Underwood, any moves that smack of recolonization are simply unacceptable (Underwood 2004: 5). This is a sentiment that is widely shared across the vast reaches of Oceania.

The Limits of Self-Determination

David Robie's enviable faith in the liberating nature of national sovereignty for the colonized in Oceania seems to have been misplaced. Not only has the principle of self-determination been rather selectively applied, but it has produced some unanticipated and unfortunate results. In places like Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, day-to-day conditions for many may have got worse rather than better since independence. This is by no means to deride the intrinsic value of sovereign independence, but to suggest that the problems associated with making modern states and nations, and with the development project generally, can easily serve to frustrate expectations of 'hope and a new future' (Robie 1989: 23).

It is also worth noting how international norms have adjusted to reflect the new realities of world order and disorder in the postcolonial period. Development assistance coupled with externally-generated reform programs has become the main instrument used by powerful international actors to counter threatening trends in the sovereign states of the previously colonized world, including Oceania. At the same time an emerging international human rights regime has developed regulations that are, in principle, indifferent to state boundaries and serve to significantly modify previous legal constraints on interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign states (Held 2003: 169). Coupled with the perceived security imperatives associated with 'failed' and 'failing' states, this has accelerated a transition from a 'culture of sovereign impunity to a culture of national and international accountability', and increased the possibility of more direct forms of international intervention in the future (ICISS 2001). All of this serves to perpetuate an imbalance of power that has existed since Europeans first entered Oceania, even if that inequity has been reduced in some respects and in some places by the process of decolonization.

If there is cause for hope and renewed faith in the noble idea of self-determination, then perhaps it is to be found in the unlikely case of Bougainville. On the face of it, the Bougainville crisis, which began in late 1988 as a localized protest against large-scale mining and escalated into a secessionist war that cost the lives of at least 10,000 people, represents one of the most spectacular and tragic failures of the promise of self-determination in the region. Here ideas of state sovereignty and territorial integrity trumped any local claims to self-determination, and gave the Papua New Guinea government virtual impunity to use all means at its disposal to reassert control over dissident groups—including outsourcing the task to a London-based provider of mercenary services (Dorney 1998). And yet its inability to do so ultimately left no option but a negotiated solution.

The 2001 Bougainville Agreement allows Bougainville a considerable amount of autonomy under the terms of its own constitution, and provides for a referendum on full independence from Papua New Guinea after a decade of self-government. The Bougainville peace process is notable in several respects, not least because it allowed local cultural sensibilities about reconciliation and decision-making to influence the process of state rehabilitation and reconstruction in meaningful ways (Regan 2002). This approach is, of course not without its problems. For one thing, it is unlikely to lead to the transformation of deeply entrenched local social and economic practices any time soon. Perhaps that is exactly what gives the new Bougainville a better chance of success.

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Notes

1. In 1986, after concerted lobbying by Pacific Islands members, New Caledonia was put back on the UN list of territories to be decolonized.

2. Critics charge that the statehood vote was unsatisfactory because it did not include independence as an option.

3. The United States was not a neutral party to the talks, making it clear that it own strategic interests were best served by a resolution of the conflict in favor of Indonesia. Recently declassified documents also suggest that US President Gerard Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger condoned the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in December 1975 (NSA 2001).

4. Colonial boundaries remained intact throughout most of the Pacific. The major exceptions were the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, which splintered into the Northern Marianna Islands, Marshall Islands, Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia; and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, which split into Kiribati and Tuvalu.

5. About 75 different indigenous languages are spoken in Solomon Islands, 110 in Vanuatu, and more than 850 in Papua New Guinea.

6. In November 2006, protests associated with the ongoing pro-democracy movement in Tonga spawned a riot that destroyed a significant part of the capital city of Nuku`alofa. This was the first incidence of serious violence in more than a decade of protest. It is also worth noting that the pro-democracy movement seeks to reform rather than overthrow the existing political system, and that state institutions remain relatively strong despite the challenges.

7. Tuvalu, with a population of less than 8,000, for example, had almost no administrative infrastructure in place when it achieved full independence in 1978, and only limited capacity to generate revenue for government services. In 1975 leaders in Papua New Guinea faced a population of three million people speaking more than 850 languages, a secondary education system that was less than a decade old, and no roads connecting the capital city to other centers of population.

8. In May 2005, Papua New Guinea's Supreme Court ruled that some of the provisions of the Enhanced Cooperation Program were unconstitutional, leading to its suspension.

9. The RAMSI intervention force includes troops and police from several island countries, including Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu. The collaborative aspect of the intervention was pursued according to the guidelines for regional responses to crises established by the Biketawa Declaration, endorsed by members of the Pacific Islands Forum in October 2000. Like other regional security initiatives, such as the 1997 Aitutaki Declaration, and the 2002 Nasonini Declaration on Regional Security, Biketawa was itself an Australian-led initiative.

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