1. Introduction and Key Questions

Nearly a decade after the initial deployment of the Regional Assistance Mission for Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003, the underlying causes of the civil conflict remain unaddressed, a viable model for service delivery remains elusive and the commodification of natural assets is occurring at a scale and nature that outstrips the capacity of institutions to mediate them durably and equitably. RAMSI was mobilized as an Australian-led multi-national mission under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum, in response to appeals from Solomon Islands’ Prime Minister. Its focus was on stabilization (restoring public order, disarming ex-militants and police and economic stabilization) and restoration of core state functions (law enforcement, adjudication, public finance management, economic regulation and service delivery). Revenue from aid and logging are projected to peak in 2013, when there are plans for a “transition” that will see a drawdown in the size of RAMSI’s security presence, and transfer of non-security matters to Australia’s bilateral aid program. A withdrawal date for ‘handing back’ security functions is not being discussed, with most commentators expecting the mission to continue for a generation or more. The Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), deeply fractured during the 1998-2002 conflict, “remains unarmed, and is years away from being able to carry out its mandated functions”, two thirds of the cost of policing is being met by donors, and the overwhelming majority of Solomon Islanders want RAMSI to stay and believe that violence would return quickly in the event of its departure. Regardless of its original designs or intentions, RAMSI is sharing responsibility with the Government for core functions of a sovereign state, at least with respect to security, while patrimonialism continues apace in other parts of government. While an external security presence remains for the foreseeable future, the shape of future of assistance to the justice system is uncertain. RAMSI’s focus has hitherto been on supporting the basic functioning of courts through the injection of international personnel and the provision of infrastructure, rather than being led by an assessment of the justice needs of the population.

Key Questions:

(i) What is the anatomy of the elite settlement that has emerged during the RAMSI period? Is the notion of an elite bargain meaningful in a context like Solomon Islands, with an external security presence,

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1 This paper was developed for the November 15 - 16, 2012 World Bank expert workshop on the Justice-Security-Development Nexus: Theory and Practice in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries. The task team leader for this paper was Saku Akmeeman, team members included David Craig and Doug Porter. For more information please contact Deborah Isser at disser@worldbank.org.


3 According to consecutive People’s Surveys (ANU Enterprises), support for RAMSI’s continuing presence remains extremely strong among the general public. In the 2011 Survey, 86% of respondents support RAMSI’s presence (up from 84% in 2010) and 65% believe that it is too early for RAMSI to scale back its activities.
extreme political fragmentation and weak client organizations? Under what circumstances might collective action organizations evolve in the coming decade, with the expected collapse of the logging industry, the growth of the mining sector and the ongoing RAMSI presence?

(ii) Has the external “security guarantee” and large aid commitment affected elite incentives to invest in, and develop local capabilities to, contain violence, resolve disputes and manage conflict? Are they blunting these incentives by removing the threat of violence? Under what conditions might elites invest in more predictable ‘rules of the game’, institutions that are seen by citizens as effective and inclusive, and legitimate in responding to key drivers of conflict?

(iii) What are the implications of this analysis for World Bank engagements, including its Rural Development Program, Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), and potential engagements by the Justice for the Poor program on local-level justice? Can donor interventions be crafted in a way that encourages elites to invest trust, resources and capabilities in viable justice and security delivery models at the local level that enhance citizen security and fair resolution of disputes?

(iv) How might the experience of British indirect rule, that administered more or less effectively a sparsely populated and geographically dispersed territory, inform thinking about institutional forms for delivering security and justice as well as their sustainability in the contemporary social, political and economic context?

2. Context and nature of conflict/dispute
Solomon Islands comprise nearly 1000 islands, a population over 500,000 and over 70 language groups. After independence from the United Kingdom in 1978, the core elements of the post-colonial political and institutional settlement were maintained for only a decade or so, before becoming unstuck gradually through the weakening and erosion in legitimacy of institutions (state and non-state), the “ongoing strength of localism and regionalism” and calls for provincial autonomy, the instability wrought by links between the logging industry and politics from the national-level to the local, crises in fiscal sustainability, longstanding patterns of spatial inequality and the perceived failure of the state to distribute the fruits of development. The late 1990s saw a structural adjustment-style reform agenda of the Solomon Islands Alliance for Change Government that came into power in 1997, and the disruption to political patronage networks caused by declining demand for logs as a consequence of the Asian financial crisis.

The civil conflict known as ‘the Tension’ began in 1998 when militants from the island of Guadalcanal (Isatabu Freedom Movement) started a violent campaign against 35,000 settlers, originally from the island of Malaita, who were living in the rural and peri-urban areas east and west of the capital, Honiara. At its heart was resentment of Malaitians’ perceived domination of land and employment opportunities, disputation within landowning groups about transactions that had enabled Malaitans to settle on Guadalcanal in increasingly large numbers, and a significant population of jobless and disaffected young men in the settlements around Honiara. A rival group, the Malaita Eagle Force, emerged in 1999. Militias grew in large measure out of the Solomon Islands Police, many of whom were more loyal to their ethnic group or ‘wantok’ (lineage or descent group), although to call it purely an ethnic conflict is an oversimplification -- elites exploited various grievances to manufacture ethnic conflict in pursuit of their own political and economic agendas. From 1998-2002, GDP fell an estimated 24 per cent, and formal government debt increased by over 40% in 2002 alone. Lawlessness and economic collapse continued apace until RAMSI was deployed.
At the time of their colonization more than a century ago, Solomon Islands constituted perhaps one of the last segmentary societies in the world, based on a strong, stable form of social organization represented by the ‘wantok’. The introduction of indirect rule to what was then the British Solomon Islands Protectorate was motivated by financial, administrative and political exigencies – to reduce the cost of administration, enable it to function with a small professional staff and to mollify local actors who were calling for greater participation in running their own affairs. It was by and large successful in administering such a geographically dispersed territory through a system of governance that included, inter alia, hybrid forms of policing (area constable) and justice (local courts). The legitimacy and effectiveness of core governance institutions and processes of the post-colonial state eroded rapidly, the state ‘retreated’ in its public order functions, and by 1998 the lowest tier of government (the area councils) had been dismantled. Local systems (typically associated with ‘traditional’ authority exercised by chiefs) came under immense stress owing to larger processes of change. In some places, these systems appear to have broken down altogether due to the entanglement of chiefs and local leaders in parochial and self-interested power struggles, especially in areas experiencing logging.

The failure of a post-colonial settlement to consolidate is not only related to crises of fiscal and institutional legitimacy, but also the lack of strong political identity above the level of the wantok and island. Post-independence elites did not self-consciously invest in constructing a language, national symbols, a shared history, and the like around which a nation-building project could be established. In the absence of a national identity promoted by the country’s political leadership, the divisions that led to the 1999-2003 violence are unsurprising. As a consequence of “the strength of the wantok system and because of the lack of a sense of national identity, the first-post-the-post electoral system produces not a strong two-party system, but a highly unstable mixture of weak parties and independent parliamentarians, who then negotiate the creation of coalition governments that divide the political spoils between them” and which cannot produce strong consensus over national priorities. The capacity of the legislature to work towards broader ‘public goods’ have thus been undermined by small constituencies, a high turnover of politicians, a small client base, and constituency grants. Taiwan remains a key external actor, particularly through Rural Constituency Development funds, by which each Member of Parliament is given $SBD6m ($US1m) to distribute directly to constituents. Lucrative investments and preferential loans from Taiwan (and increasingly China) also heavily influence the political landscape and sit at odds with the programming of other donors.

RAMSI was never designed to be a protracted occupation. While it succeeded in stabilizing both security and government finances quickly, and has attempted to fill capacity gaps in central state institutions, RAMSI has not addressed underlying conflict stresses, the significant weakening of conflict management capacities (both state and non-state) in the post-independence era and a breakdown of social authority in some places, especially those impacted upon by extractive industries. Today, it is operating today on somewhat “fictional premises, namely that at some point the country’s capacity will improve across the board to the point that it can withdraw.”

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1 Lawrence H. Keeley, *War Before Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). This was adequate for a small-scale, subsistence agricultural society, albeit one characterized by a high endemic level of violence.
2 Akin, in press.
3 If wantok and ethnic loyalties within a national institution like the police are ever to be overcome, this will only happen if police recruits are bonded to the Solomon Islands state first and other identity groups second.
5 Fukuyama, op cit, p20.
3. World Bank Program

The World Bank is in the early stages of preparing a new Country Partnership Strategy. Its existing portfolio reflects a range of interventions and modalities – community-driven development, employment-intensive works programs, economic policy reforms, nascent engagements on EITI and justice – delivered through technical assistance and investment projects and recently through a small development policy loan of $US2m.\(^9\) The work outlined below is meant to inform the development of the Country Partnership Strategy and various nascent operational engagements such as the successor to the Rural Development Program, EITI and Justice for the Poor.

4. BNPP Engagement purpose(s)

The engagement aims to serve several purposes:

(i) To better understand the salient features of elite bargaining in Solomons and the likely implications for security and justice;

(ii) To use this knowledge to positively influence existing and future Bank operations and to develop a better understanding of potential entry points for development agencies that would favor institutional transformation and more broadly effective, legitimate, inclusive and sustainable service delivery.

The BNPP program will specifically inform two sets of interventions currently being prepared by the Justice of the Poor program, which build on empirical research and analysis of local level dispute management systems, including their capacity, legitimacy and effectiveness:

(i) An institutional and fiscal analysis of the lower tier courts, a collaborative study with Government and the Judiciary focused on the functionality and performance of local courts and ‘reform’ options to support improved (more effective, equitable and durable) service delivery. The analysis aims to encourage dialogue amongst key stakeholders about the political, administrative and fiscal feasibility and sustainability of the various modalities being examined. The BNPP analysis will inform an understanding of how various options may align with, or run counter to, elite incentives and the extent to which these interventions might secure the support of leaders and citizens.

(ii) A new project involving community officers, lay community members acting in a quasi-enforcement/community governance role within their communities for minor social regulation issues, and modeled on the “area messenger” or “area constable” of the colonial and immediate post-colonial period. The initial pilots will predominantly focus on rural service delivery, but one pilot will focus on a peri-urban or urban area. The BNPP analysis will help inform the viability of this model in light of evolving political settlements at the local and national level.

At the most basic level, both pieces of work are aimed at building institutional capacities -- dispute resolution capabilities, as well as creating “space” for dialogue and discussion.

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\(^9\) The concessional lending envelope is limited, so much of the portfolio is financed through multi-donor trust funds.
5. Tasks

Addressing these questions will require a political economy analysis of the nature of the emerging elite bargain, including the impact of the RAMSI, and its effect on the development of local capabilities for security and justice, as well as broader governance and service delivery. This is meant to inform the two J4P work streams noted above, and the Bank's broader strategy and flagship operations (a successor to the Rural Development Program).