

***RAMSI and the relationship between security and economic prosperity***  
**Address to the Third Australia Solomon Islands Business Forum**  
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Members of the Australia-Pacific Islands Business Council, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for providing me with this opportunity to update you on the work of RAMSI, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands.

I would like at the outset to congratulate the Australia-Pacific Islands Business Council for organizing this forum. The strong interest of participants for three years running is proof enough that there has been real and positive change in Solomon Islands.

I am sure that many of you here today are already aware of the history of the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands. However, please let me provide you with a short potted history.

RAMSI arrived in Solomon Island in July 2003 at the invitation of the Solomon Islands Government following a period of violence, intimidation and, ultimately, the virtual collapse of the state.

At this time, Solomon Islands was unable to perform many of the basic economic functions, which most people considered to be a natural part of a country's affairs (including, paying its debts).

It required assistance from its friends and neighbors in the Pacific to restore peace and security, and to rebuild its damaged institutions and fragile economy.

Beyond the collection of weapons, the arrest of militants and the return of the rule of law to Solomon Island, RAMSI's arrival in 2003 brought improvements to the Solomon Island economy.

RAMSI advisers began working in the Ministry of Finance and Treasury within days of the arrival of the RAMSI Participating Police Force and Military.

They were focused on restoring the fundamentals of a functioning government and economy to Solomon Islands.

This has been a slow, but positive exercise. There have been some bumps on the road, including the impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Solomon Islands.

Real Gross Domestic Product grew at a real average rate of 7.7 per cent in the five years to 2008, then in 2009 the Ministry of Finance estimates that the economy contracted in real terms by 4.7 per cent, before recovering in 2010 to grow by 6.6 per cent.

The IMF estimates that growth in 2011 will be a very strong 9 per cent.

These growth rates have been relatively high, but with population growing at 2.3 per cent a year, the per capita gains are a little weaker.

In fact, real GDP per capita is still more than 10 per cent below where it was in 1995 before the start of the tensions. And, in 2011, it is still below where it was at Independence.

That is, according to this imperfect but most widely used measure of standard of living, the average citizen of Solomon Islands enjoys a standard of living today that is lower than his or her compatriot did in 1978.

I say this not as a criticism of anybody or any government or any donor. I say it only to point out that Solomon Islands will require a sustained and high level of assistance for many years to come.

Why then, you may ask, is RAMSI embarking on this thing we are calling “transition”?

I will use the rest of my presentation to answer this important question.

Transition is a broad term and what it means depends on which part of RAMSI we are looking at.

As most of you will know, RAMSI is made up of three broad components: civilians working on RAMSI’s development agenda; police engaged in restoring law and order; and military providing protection to the police if and when needed.

### **Development Assistance**

Transition for RAMSI’s development program is relatively straightforward. RAMSI’s development program has three parts:

- Economic governance which supports the Ministry of Finance and Treasury in areas such as the budget unit, Accountant General, and Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise.
- Machinery of Government which supports a wide range of government ministries and institutions including the Auditor General, Ombudsman, Electoral Commission, Parliament, Public Service Commission and Provincial governments; and
- Law and Justice which supports the courts, judiciary, other justice sector agencies and correctional services.

For these programs we have already started to reduce the technical assistance being provided.

The number of RAMSI advisers working in Solomon Islands government agencies has reduced from over 100 to around 80 now, and this will reduce further to around 65 in 2013.

This is happening because there is a need to move beyond technical assistance, which focuses on individuals and individual tasks, to a focus on the strengthening of the institutions themselves.

How we provide assistance needs to change from that which is needed in a post-conflict situation to that which is appropriate to a long term development strategy.

All RAMSI development programs are being reviewed and where there is a need to continue assistance the programs will be redesigned and moved across to AusAID's bilateral aid program or to the aid programs of other donors.

This makes good sense because traditional donors can plan and provide long term assistance.

RAMSI is not well-placed to do this because it has been conceived and managed as a temporary intervention, subject to a four year budget allocation.

So in the area of RAMSI's development program, transition is about continuity and change.

The way assistance is provided and who will provide that assistance will change, but assistance will continue to be provided.

## **Policing**

In the area of policing, transition is about shifting the focus of RAMSI's Participating Police Force from supporting frontline policing to capacity development of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.

We are stepping back from everyday policing. We have withdrawn from two provincial police posts so far this year, and will withdraw from three more in the coming weeks.

There will be five more withdrawals in the first half of next year.

I should stress that we are not abandoning these police posts.

We have established a mentoring program for Provincial Police Commanders, are providing important and much needed logistical support, installing a radio communications capability, and refurbishing police stations in key locations.

These changes in the way assistance is being provided recognize the increased capability of the RSIPF in the area of everyday policing.

RAMSI's Participating Police Force will focus more on capacity development in areas such as:

- The delivery of leadership development programs, including personal and professional development of RSIPF personnel identified as potential future leaders;
- Improving the training continuum of rank and file RSIPF officers with rank-based and specialist skill set training opportunities;
- Increasing the number of RAMSI PPF advisers to improve the RSIPF's performance in the areas of professional standards, human resources, learning and development, strategy and policy, public relations, finance, and logistics;
- Creating a RSIPF Officer Safety Training faculty within the RSIPF Police Academy and train 90 per cent of the RSIPF rank and file in situational awareness and use of basic equipment such as batons, handcuffs and OC spray;
- Training and equipping qualified RSIPF members in Honiara to be capable of undertaking frontline public order management operations in support of the Police Response Team;
- Increasing the Police Response Team numbers from 28 to 50, including training and equipment for less than lethal capabilities.

So instead of everyday policing, more of the police we deploy will have specialist skill sets and be engaged in higher level capacity development activities.

This will require fewer, but more highly skilled, RAMSI police.

Seeing the withdrawal from Provincial Police Posts and other moves, the media sometimes says RAMSI is leaving Solomon Islands.

I would like to assure you that on 1 July 2013 there will still be around 150 RAMSI Participating Police Force members in Solomon Islands.

This is a transition strategy, not an exit.

### **The Military Contingent**

I haven't said much about RAMSI's military contingent.

We continue to have three platoons of troops which come variously from Australia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and Tonga.

Decisions on the funding of the military contingent are made on an annual basis in the context of the Australian budget process.

For the military contingent, transition will in due course involve their withdrawal, but no decisions have been made on this yet.

### **Risks to the ongoing success of RAMSI**

I would like to conclude by talking about some of the risks to the ongoing success of RAMSI.

The United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, visited Solomon Islands last month.

It was the first visit ever by a UN Secretary General to the Solomons, and only the second visit by a serving Secretary General to a Pacific Island country.

It was a truly historic and significant visit and I was honoured to welcome him and his delegation to RAMSI.

In our meeting, which went for over an hour, we discussed our respective experiences with regional peace keeping missions.

He was of the view that RAMSI's transition would provide good lessons for others.

I told the Secretary General that, to my mind, the greatest risks to RAMSI's success are that of leaving too soon, or staying too long.

After eight years, and notwithstanding the very obvious improvements in the law and order and economic situation in Solomon Islands, 84 per cent of the people support the continued presence of RAMSI in Solomon Islands.

Clearly, there is strong and continuing confidence in RAMSI.

The key to a successful transition will be the maintenance of confidence.

Not in RAMSI itself, but in the security environment and in the management of the economy.

Nothing we do under transition should undermine confidence.

Our success to date and in the long term is dependent on government, business, the community and donors feeling safe and able to operate free from intimidation.

Success is also dependent on sustaining and improving the capacity of Solomon Islands to take the lead.

This means RAMSI, and other donors, must continue to focus on building the capacity and capability of Solomon Islands in the areas we have always focused: law and order, economic management and good governance.

It also means RAMSI should continue to step back from its high profile to allow Solomon Islands institutions to justly take credit for improved outcomes.

This is essential if the public is to rebuild their confidence in the agencies of government.

Ladies and gentlemen, RAMSI's transition is being implemented in a steady and measured way, in consultation with all stakeholders, and with regard to the circumstances on the ground.

Transition is not a mad rush to some pre-determined end point.

It is a process, and it has a way to go yet.

Thank you.