

CONFLICT RISK ASSESSMENT

OCEANIA

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I. OVERVIEW

This report provides an analytical assessment of conflict risk in Oceania. The Oceania region can be further divided into the sub-regions (on the basis of geography, culture, language, etc.) Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia.

Table 1: Sub-Regions of Oceania

Polynesia	Melanesia	Micronesia
American Samoa (USA)	Fiji	Federated States of Micronesia**
Cook Islands*	Molluccas Islands (Indonesia)***	Guam (USA)
French Polynesia (France)	New Caledonia (France)	Kiribati
Hawaii (USA)	Papua New Guinea	Marshall Islands**
New Zealand/Aotearoa	Solomon Is	Nauru
Niue*	Vanuatu	Northern Marianas (USA).
Pitcairn Is. (UK)	West Papua/Irian Jaya (Indonesia)	Palau**
Rapanui/Easter Island/Isla de Pascua (Chile)	East Timor (Indonesia)***	
Samoa	Torres Straits Islands (Australia)	
Tokelau (New Zealand)		
Tonga		
Tuvalu		
Wallis and Futuna (France)		

* Cook Islands and Niue have treaties of free association with New Zealand, whereby New Zealand is responsible for foreign affairs and defence (in consultation with the Cook Islands). Cook Islanders and Niueans are also citizens of New Zealand.

** Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Palau have compacts of free association with the United States, whereby the USA retains certain powers over defence and foreign affairs. This includes the right for the Americans (and only the Americans) to operate military facilities in the islands. In return, these states receive significant amounts of aid.

*** The boundaries of this region are debatable. Some commentators do not include Eastern Indonesia, Rapanui, etcetera. Generally I have used the most expansive definition and have included all territories and states with significant numbers of Melanesians, Polynesians, or Micronesians. I have chosen to exclude East Timor in my report as this is covered in the CIFP [Conflict Risk Assessment Report: Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines](#) by George Conway and Nozomi Kishi.. Both the Molucca Islands and East Timor are only partly-Melanesian. In particular the indigenous Melanesian aspect of the Molucca Islands has been diminished by waves of Malay migration and invasion since the 17th century. There are strong political dimensions to Moluccan and East Timorese self-identification as Melanesian; they declare themselves to be Melanesian as a means of distinguishing themselves from Indonesian identity.

II. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Being as there are numerous states and colonies in the Pacific Islands, it is necessary to be somewhat selective and to only highlight potential conflict risks as they occur across our cases and issue areas. This analysis crosses nine interrelated issue areas identified as important in their potential for conflict development: History of Armed Conflict; Governance and Political Instability; Militarization; Population Heterogeneity; Demographic Stress; Economic Performance; Human Development; Environmental Stress; and International Linkages.

CIFP risk assessment reports are regional in focus, under the premise that "risk potential" is a relative term, and that a regional comparative focus allows not only the identification of areas of concern within target countries but provides a means of assigning relative priority to different areas of concern on a regional basis.

This study examines structural factors and key concerns, which correlate to an increased potential for violent conflict within each issue area across the region. By adopting an analytical approach (rather than indicators-based approach as in other CIFP risk assessments), analysis can extend beyond statistical data and adopt a more holistic perspective to conflict prevention. This analysis will be supplemented by statistical evidence.

Across the region, conflict levels are relatively low and the risk of conflict is also relatively low (when compared with more conflict-prone areas). However, the risk of conflict in Oceania seems to be increasing. Melanesia, in particular, has seen growing political instability and conflict in recent years. There are also low levels of awareness about the region internationally, so there has been little attention paid to problems of insecurity and conflict.

In order to establish a framework for analyzing the emergence of violent conflict, it is necessary to understand how crises typically develop and which possible avoidance efforts can be effective. In general terms, the factors that contribute to conflict escalation are categorized as "structural factors," "accelerators," and "triggers."

- "Structural factors" or "root causes" are those factors that form the pre-conditions of crisis situations, such as systematic political exclusion, shifts in demographic balance, entrenched economic inequities, economic decline and ecological deterioration;
- "Accelerators" or "precipitators" are factors that work upon root causes in order to increase their level of significance; and,
- "Triggers" are sudden events that act as catalysts igniting a crisis or conflict, such as the assassination of a leader, election fraud, or a political scandal.

This report will focus primarily on structural factors but some discussion of accelerator factors will also occur in specific cases.

CIFP rates a country's degree of "risk" in terms of this set of structural factors. "Risk" is considered high in cases where a country has an enduring history of armed conflict, is politically unstable or has unrepresentative or repressive political institutions, is heavily militarized, has a heterogeneous and divided population, suffers from significant demographic and environmental stresses, has had poor economic performance and low levels of human development, and is engaged with the international community in ways that detract from, rather than contribute to, peaceful conflict management.

On the other hand, "risk" is considered low in countries that have a history of successfully managing conflict without resorting to violence, that have developed stable democratic political institutions, that respect fundamental human rights, that are less heavily militarized, that lack profound ethnic or religious cleavages or demographic stresses, that have achieved sustainable levels of economic development as well as healthy social and environment conditions, and that are free from serious external conflicts and threats.

Table 2: Key Issues Underlying Conflict Potential in Selected States and Regions, Part I¹

	History of Armed Conflict	Governance and Political Stability	Militarization	Population Heterogeneity
French Polynesia	N/A	Colony: lack of representative government.	Strong French military presence resented by some indigenous nationalists.	Indigenous (Polynesian) population and many European settlers.
Tonga	N/A	Absolute Monarchy: unrepresentative government. Extensive corruption.	Increasing (and unnecessary) military spending.	N/A
Fiji	Indigenous nationalist coups in 1987 and 2000.	Coups have undermined rule of law and political institutions.	Excessive military spending. Military has undermined democracy through repeated political interventions.	Conflict between Indo-Fijian descendents of indentured labour and indigenous Fijians.
Molucca Islands	Ongoing ethnic tensions escalated into violence after fall of Suharto.	Unrepresentative: Indonesian central government has imposed its authority.	Indonesian armed forces (TNI) have intervened (through proxies) to quell nationalist movement.	Population divided between Christians and Muslims. Influx of Javanese settlers has contributed to instability
New Caledonia	Violent anti-colonial struggle reached apex in mid 1980's.	Colony: unrepresentative government. Moving towards increasing autonomy.	High degree of militarization during conflict period. Now decreasing.	Population divided between indigenous Kanaks and European settlers.
Papua New Guinea	Bougainville secession armed conflict (1975-2001)	High degree of electoral instability. Extensive corruption	Lack of security. Problems within armed forces.	Tremendous ethnic and linguistic diversity.

¹ This chart examines all of the Micronesian countries together because they experience very similar conflict risk factors.

Solomon Islands	2000 coup and low-intensity conflict between Malaitans and Guadalcanalese.	Ethnically-biased institutions and political instability.	Proliferation of small arms has worsened security situation.	Ethnically diverse.
Vanuatu	Instability during transition to independence.	Political instability in recent years.	N/A	Ethnic and linguistic diversity
West Papua	Ongoing indigenous guerrilla insurrection against central government.	Unrepresentative government. Indigenous peoples seeking self-determination.	Heavy presence of Indonesian military and private mercenaries.	High ethnic diversity. Divisions between indigenous peoples and settlers from elsewhere in Indonesia.
Micronesia	N/A	N/A	Strong American military presence.	Ethnic diversity in FSM.

Table 3: Key Issues Underlying Conflict Potential in Selected States and Regions, Part II²

	Economic Performance	Demographic Stress	Human Development	Environmental Stress	International Linkages
French Polynesia	N/A	N/A	N/A	Nuclear testing.	N/A
Tonga	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Fiji	Indigenous Fijians perceive themselves to be relatively poorer than Indo-Fijians.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Molucca Islands	Affirmative action in favour of Muslims angers local Christians.	Transmigration: introduction of large numbers of settlers from Java and other areas.	Low levels of human development.	N/A	N/A
New Caledonia	Europeans dominate economy at expense of Kanaks.	Importation of European settlers resented by Kanaks.	Greater levels of human development amongst Europeans than Kanaks.	N/A	Bilateral territorial dispute with Vanuatu.

² In addition to the above cases of conflict potential it is important to note that there are significant indigenous nationalist movements in Hawaii, New Zealand, Rapanui, and the Torres Straits Islands.

Papua New Guinea	Poor economic performance has contributed to institutional weakness.	Rapidly increasing population.	Low levels of human development decrease legitimacy of the state.	Lack of environmental regulation: pollution and displacement of indigenous peoples.	Border incursions by West Papuan guerrillas and Indonesian army.
Solomon Islands	Poor economic performance.	Rapidly increasing population will put strain on resources. Clashes between Guadalcanalese and Malaitan settlers on Guadalcanal.	Low levels of human development. Poor education system.	Logging industry is corrupt and contributes to political instability and resource scarcity.	Western province ethnically similar to Bougainville. Support for Bougainville secessionist movement and border incursions.
Vanuatu	Poor economic performance.	Rapid population growth. Young population.	Low levels of human development. Lack of opportunity.	N/A	See New Caledonia.
West Papua	Poor economic performance relative to rest of Indonesia. Mineral wealth is extracted with few local benefits.	Transmigration: introduction of large numbers of settlers from Java and other areas.	Low levels of human development.	See Papua New Guinea.	See Papua New Guinea.
Micronesia	N/A	High levels of urbanisation. High population density. Rapid population growth.	N/A	Tenuous environmental situation. Resource scarcities made worse by climate change and population growth.	Territorial disputes (non-violent) with USA.

III. HISTORY OF ARMED CONFLICT

a.) Introduction

While “violent conflict” is the dependent variable of conflict analysis, a country’s history of armed conflict also operates as a causal factor underlying the potential for continued or future violence. An enduring history of violent conflict can itself serve as an incentive for parties to continue to resort to violence as a means of airing and attempting to resolve grievances. Such a history can also indicate a greater inclination for armed forces to use repressive means to address disputes or civil unrest, and an inability or unwillingness of the state to resolve disputes through institutional channels. Flows of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) produced by past or ongoing violent conflict can also have destabilizing effects within affected regions and countries, potentially spiralling into larger problems. Furthermore, the impact of conflict on material living standards, levels of human development, the environment and other issue areas, can create further incentives for violence.

While there have been few major armed conflicts in the post World War Two era in the states and territories of Oceania, there seems to be a recent worrying trend in Melanesia of political instability and conflict.³ Both Fiji and the Solomon Islands experienced coups and sporadic violence in 2000 and armed conflicts broke out in the Molucca Islands and West Papua after the fall of Suharto in Indonesia. Furthermore, Papua New Guinea experienced a high degree of instability and increased tribal warfare in the last elections (2002).

b.) History of Conflict in Relevant States

Molucca Islands: After the collapse of the Suharto regime in 1998 the control of the central government in Indonesia weakened. The province of East Timor was granted independence in 2002 following a 1999 referendum marred by violence. With the granting of independence to East Timor the autonomy and independence demands of other nationalist movements such as in Aceh, the Molucca Islands, and West Papua grew more strident. Both Molucca and West Papua have predominately Christian indigenous populations. Religious tensions have been increasing in recent years as the Indonesian government has become increasingly ‘Islamicised’ and Muslim settlers (from Java and other overpopulated areas) have been migrating to Molucca and West Papua.⁴ Moluccan independence leaders also allege that the Muslim groups are supported both indirectly and directly by the Indonesian army and Muslim Jihadists from elsewhere in Indonesia (some of whom have ties to radical Islamic groups outside of Indonesia).⁵ The conflict in the Molluccas has intensified in recent years and resulted in many internally displaced persons.

West Papua: Indonesia was granted formal (*de jure*) sovereignty over West Papua (formerly a Dutch possession, then a UN trusteeship) in 1969 after the farcical ‘act of free choice’ (or ‘act free of choice’ as it has been dubbed by some observers) in which Indonesia hand-picked 1 025 chiefs to vote in a referendum on behalf of 700 000 West Papuans. Since then, the West Papuan people have faced attempts by the Indonesian government to assimilate them into Indonesia, not just politically and economically but culturally. This has been done through oppressive rule and a policy of ethnocide, whereby Papuans are forbidden to speak their own languages in schools, and the government’s attempts to demographically dilute the Papuan

³ <http://first.sipri.org> Accessed August 8, 2004. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) defines major armed conflicts as those with battle deaths exceeding 1000 in a single year.

⁴ <http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewCountries/5BA36B15A77971D5C125695A00354054> Accessed August 8, 2004. The Global IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) Database.

⁵ Conversation with Moluccan leaders, Suva, Fiji. 2002.

presence in West Papua through transmigration schemes. Indonesia controls West Papua's considerable mineral resources but Papuans receive little benefit.

West Papuan resistance to Indonesian rule has been spearheaded by the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM), a guerrilla group. Violence in the territory has largely been of a low intensity but has persisted over many years. Since the fall of Suharto, violence in West Papua has greatly increased, as have the demands for independence of Papuan nationalist groups. In January 2003 President Megawati Sukarnoputri issued a decree dividing West Papua into three provinces. The decree was in response to continuing separatist political and military activity.

Papua New Guinea: the most serious conflict in Papua New Guinea (PNG) in recent decades has been the Bougainville conflict. Bougainville is geographically and culturally a part of the Solomon Islands (more specifically, the Western Province of the Solomon Islands). The separation of Bougainville from the Solomon Islands was the result of an 1899 negotiation which saw the Germans cede the north Solomons (but not Bougainville) to the British in return for a British recognition of German claims to Western Samoa.

When Papua New Guinea became independent in 1975 Bougainvilleans also made an unsuccessful bid for independence. With the opening of the Panguna Copper Mine, the world's largest copper mine, Bougainvilleans resented the loss of land and environmental destruction which the mine caused, as well as what they felt was an unfair share of the profits from the mine. As negotiations broke down the Bougainvillean nationalists became radicalised and formed the Bougainville Resistance Army (BRA). The BRA began a guerrilla warfare campaign and the crisis came to take on regional dimensions as Australia supported PNG with military aid and the border with the Solomon Islands became porous with the proliferation of small arms on both sides. In 2001 a peace agreement was signed through the mediation of New Zealand. Conflict between independence and pro-PNG groups continues today. There has also been a governance crisis in Papua New Guinea in recent years. This crisis has manifested itself in lawlessness, tribal warfare, and political instability.

Solomon Islands: The Solomon Islands have suffered much conflict and political instability in recent years. The source of this recent conflict primarily stems from two factors: 1) the resentment of the various ethnic groups of the Solomon Islands (especially the Guadalcanalese) of the economic and political dominance of Malaita Islanders; and 2) conflict over land in Guadalcanal between Guadalcanalese and ethnic Malaitan settlers. Corruption and a lack of good governance have exacerbated these problems. In 1999 Guadalcanal militants began to harass Malaitans and other non-Guadalcanalese settlers. This harassment was manifested in many forms including arson and roadblocks. The Solomon Islands government declared a state of emergency and former Fijian prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka was brought in to negotiate a peace settlement (the Honiara Accord) later that year. Despite the Accord, violence continued and reached an apex with a 2000 coup. Peace was finally restored with the intervention of a regional peace-keeping force in 2003.

Vanuatu: With the end of joint British and French rule (condominium) in 1980 several islands attempted to secede. In May 1980 secessionists seized the capital of Espiritu Santo Island (Vanuatu's largest island) and declared the independent Republic of Vemerana. Around the same time, the southern island of Tanna was split between rebel and government supporters. In June, several other northern islands also split from the central government and merged into a Provisional Government of the Northern Islands led by Jimmy Stevens. France and Britain sent a force to restore order in Santo but it was completely ineffective.⁶ With independence on 30 July, the new government sought the intervention of the Papua New Guinea Defence Forces (with Australian logistical support). This military intervention succeeded in rapidly restoring order following the arrest of secessionist leaders. The governing Vanua'aku party retained power from 1980-1991 under Fr. Walter Lini.

⁶ Ron Crocombe, *The South Pacific*, (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2001) 445.

In 1988-1989 Vanuatu experienced another period of political instability. In 1988 a by-election was won by the Vanua'aku party but boycotted by the Union of Moderate Parties (UMP). Consequently, President Ati Sokomanu violated the constitution by appointing his nephew Barak Sope (of the UMP) as the Prime Minister. A judge ruled the action illegal and replaced and jailed Sokomanu and Sope.

In 1995 the National United Party (NUP) won power under their new leader Fr. Lini with the backing of Dinh Van Than, a wealthy Vietnamese (Vanuatu citizen) businessman who enjoyed a high degree of political influence. Once elected, the NUP replaced many bureaucrats, as well as the Chief Justice, who were accused of being sympathetic to the UMP. When the government collapsed after a month Lini attempted to retain power by dismissing the Commissioner of Police, chief justice, attorney general, and the clerk of parliament. The attempted coup failed and a new government was elected. Vanuatu entered a period of political instability with five changes of government between 1997 and 1998.

New Caledonia: More than any other place in the Pacific, New Caledonia had a history of violent resistance to colonial rule.⁷ This resistance reached its apex in Les Evenements (The Events) from 1984-1988 when the conflict between the pro-independence indigenous Kanaks and the French government was characterised by an escalating cycle of sporadic acts of violence followed by reprisals. Kanaks were marginalised from the state and economy and had been reduced to a minority by French migration policy. Tensions reached such a high level that a full-blown armed conflict in the form of a civil war became a possibility. A 1987 referendum on independence was boycotted by Kanak nationalists.

Tensions substantially decreased with the signing of the Matignon Accords in 1988, which set out a program of power-sharing and increasing autonomy for the territory. The Matignon Accords were followed by the Nouméa Accord in 1998, which changed the status of New Caledonia from an Overseas Territory to a Special Territorial Entity within the French Republic. A referendum is scheduled for 15-20 years from the signing of the Nouméa Accord.

Fiji: Conflict in Fiji has been characterised by two forces: first, ethnic antagonism between the two largest ethnic communities, Indo-Fijians and indigenous (Melanesian) Fijians; and second, repeated attempts by neo-traditional Fijian elements to seize control of the instruments of state power. Elites in Cakaudrove and Lau provinces in Eastern Fiji gained power under colonialism and have attempted to freeze and distort tradition in defence of their power. In 1989 a Fijian colonel from the Fiji Military Forces, Sitiveni Rabuka, seized control of the state (from a government that was characterised as being Indian-dominated) in a relatively bloodless coup. Rabuka had close ties to the institutions of the neo-traditional elite including the church, the chiefs, and the military. He introduced a racially-biased constitution in 1990 that deprived Indo-Fijians of basic political rights. Several years later Rabuka renounced his earlier acts and introduced a more balanced constitution, which was promulgated in 1998. A year later, Fiji elected its first Indian Prime Minister, Mehendra Chaudhry.

Two years later (in May 2000) a corrupt part-Fijian businessman named George Speight staged a coup and took many parliamentarians (including Chaudhry) hostage. Several months after the coup elements of an elite army unit staged an attempted mutiny. After a series of short-lived governments, the Great Council of Chiefs installed Laisenia Qarase as the interim Prime Minister, and he was democratically elected about a year later. The 2000 coup had disastrous effects for Fiji's economy and for ethnic relations.

Tonga: Tonga is one of the last remaining absolute monarchies on earth. Out of thirty members of parliament, nine are democratically elected, nine are the representatives of thirty-three nobles, and the King appoints twelve. The ten cabinet members are entirely drawn from the King's appointees. There has been much recent evidence of abnormally high military spending and corruption by the monarchy. The Tonga Human Rights and Democracy Movement challenges the power of Tongan aristocracy and seeks to make the system more

⁷ This resistance included revolts in 1878 and 1917.

democratic while retaining the monarchy. This movement is entirely peaceful but some observers argue that things may reach a crisis point if the ruling elite does not voluntarily relinquish some of its power.

French Polynesia: Although there has been an independence movement in French Polynesia for decades, there has been little violence. Most of the supporters of independence from French colonial rule are indigenous (Polynesian) Tahitians. In recent years, support for independence seems to be increasing. The 1999 constitution increased the autonomy of the territory.

c.) Refugees and Internal Displacement

Flows of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) produced by past or ongoing violent conflict have destabilizing effects within affected regions and countries, potentially spiralling into larger problems. Furthermore, the impact of conflict on material living standards, levels of human development, the environment and other issue areas, can create further incentives for violence.

In Oceania the only significant refugee and IDP flows have been in the Melanesia sub-region. During the 2000 coup in Fiji some Indians living in isolated settlements in Tailevu, Naitasiri, and other provinces became IDPs, but this has neither been a long-term problem nor a significant destabilising factor. During the recent conflict in the Solomon Islands (1999-2003) many Malaitan settlers living on Guadalcanal have returned to Malaita due to a perception of insecurity. In fact, over 10% of the total population of the Solomon Islands became internally displaced.⁸ After the intervention of an Australian-led regional peacekeeping force in 2003 the majority of internally displaced persons returned.⁹ There have also been some flows of refugees from the Bougainville Conflict in Papua New Guinea into the Solomon Islands (particularly the adjacent Western Province).

The refugee flows produced by the recent conflicts in Indonesia in the Molucca Islands and West Papua have been of particular concern. There have been large numbers of refugees and IDPs produced by both of these conflicts. The Moluccan IDPs have fled to all parts of Indonesia, in particular West Papua and Java. This has the potential to further destabilise these areas as Java already has among the highest population densities of any area in the world and this leads to a difficulty in providing adequate social services. Also, The Moluccan are predominately Christian and there has been recent religious violence in both Java and West Papua. Finally, indigenous West Papuans are already resisting the significant flows of foreign settlers into the province through Indonesia's transmigration policy. Some Moluccan IDPs have returned home but renewed violence in April 2004 created more IDPs. As the situation now stands there are approximately 100 000 Moluccan IDPs.¹⁰

In West Papua, many refugees have fled to the western parts of Papua New Guinea. This region is already experiencing a serious governance problems as the West Papuan guerrilla movement the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM) commits frequent incursions and uses the area as an operations base. Moreover, Western Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea has been experiencing tribal violence. Therefore, refugee flows from West Papua, as well as incursions by the West Papuan OPM guerrillas have the potential to lead to further conflict and destabilisation in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. However, conflict (and therefore refugee flows) in West Papua has abated in the past two years and many West Papuan refugees have returned.¹¹

⁸ Norwegian Refugee Council, Global IDP Project, <http://www.idpproject.org/>, accessed August 9, 2004.

⁹ Global IDP Project.

¹⁰ Global IDP Project.

¹¹ Global IDP Project. It is difficult to find statistics on the precise number of West Papuan refugees and IDPs but most estimates range in the thousands.

IV. GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY

a) Introduction

The weakness of state institutions and democratic processes can bear a strong relationship to the potential for conflict in a particular state. This weakness can take the form of unrepresentative and illiberal institutions, or the inability (or unwillingness) of the state (and its governing elites) to provide security and a relatively fair system for the distribution of political power and economic resources (corruption). Corruption and other forms of mal-governance, as well as unrepresentative institutions have the effect of diminishing respect for the legitimacy of the state and the rule of law. This in turn, encourages groups to seek access to political and economic power through extra-political and/or extra-legal means.

b.) State Strength and Political Institutions

As noted above, in the absence of strong state institutions a power vacuum forms and the rule of law begins to deteriorate. A change in the governance regime is associated with a substantial change in the mode of governance or the ideology guiding the government. Changes in regime often result in politically volatile situations associated with high risk of conflict potential. Political institutions and regime durability are generally relatively strong in the Pacific Islands with the exception of a few cases (most of which are found in Melanesia). One measure of the stability of most Pacific democracies has been the regular "turnover" or election of new governments without incidence. Rates of voter participation have also been fairly high.¹²

Fiji: Fiji has experienced three coups (May 1987, September 1987, and May 2000). In these coups, indigenous Fijian nationalists seized power through direct armed intervention when they felt that their control would be diminished by "Indian" governments. In the periods before (1970-1987) and between (1987-2000) the coups the government of Fiji has been relatively stable with a democratic regime. However, in the periods immediately after the 1987 and 2000 coups Fiji experienced a variety of regimes including military rule and interim governments appointed by the president. In the ten months after the 2000 coup Fiji experienced seven changes of government. Accompanying this political instability has been the tendency of each new government to introduce a new constitution. There were constitutions in 1970, 1990, and 1997. After the 1987 coup Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka declared Fiji a republic. Following the 2000 coup the Fijian Constitution was once again being reviewed. Moreover, the judiciary undermined its own standing during the 2000 coup when Chief Justice Timoci Tuivaga wrote decrees for the military abrogating the 1997 constitution. Elections were held successfully in Fiji in 2001 and democracy was restored. Despite the restoration of democracy, the 2000 coup in Fiji seriously undermined respect for the rule of law and governance institutions.

Papua New Guinea: Papua New Guinea is the weakest state in the Pacific and the one with the most serious governance problems. In PNG there has been an almost complete collapse of state authority in certain parts of the country, such as the Southern Highlands. The government is unable to provide services in this area or to guarantee the security of its inhabitants. Moreover, power is often sought outside of the system through criminality and corruption. The weakness of law enforcement and judicial institutions also leads to the pursuit of power through extra-legal means. In PNG, the police have themselves resorted to illegal means such as accepting bribes and committing crimes in order to attain a reasonable standard of living.

¹² Ben Reilly, "The Africanisation of the South Pacific," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 54, No.3,, 2000.

Papua New Guinea is a relatively constitutionally stable state but has a very unstable electoral system. There is a tendency for candidates to run for election as independents, then seek concessions from political parties in return for their loyalty. This system is plagued by instability as MP's often cross party lines and seek no-confidence votes against the government. The government has adjourned parliament several times for months in order to avoid such votes. Elections are often accompanied by violence (particularly in the Southern Highlands Province) and this violence reached its apex in the 2002 elections.

It has been said that in Papua New Guinea "politics is the economy" and this becomes abundantly clear come election time. The institutions of democracy are dominated by the "wantok" system. Papua New Guinea is a country with roughly 900 languages, thus "wantoks" (those who speak the same language as you) tend to be people from the same extended kinship group. "Wantokism" is the distribution of resources to your wantoks once elected. Corruption has become an inherent part of the electoral system.

Politics are thus dominated by short-term interests and the rate of turnover in political leadership is remarkably high. Moreover, many candidates often run in the same constituency and are elected with less than 25% of the vote. Politicians have the tendency to run as independents and then affiliate themselves with a party in a process of bargaining which occurs immediately after the election. Party politics is organised on the basis of social groups (example Highlanders, Urban residents, islanders).¹³

The current Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, has made attempts to reform the political system but it appears to be a difficult task. The Chief Ombudsman Ila Geno has filed court proceedings against the Prime Minister. Geno alleges that Prime Minister Somare adjourned parliament for six months to avoid a no-confidence vote. Geno is seeking to force Somare to return parliament. The weakness of the political system in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere leads disaffected groups to satisfy their demands outside of the system and increases the risk of conflict.

Vanuatu: Vanuatu has also experienced periods of intense political instability, such as 1997-1998, when the government changed five times after an attempted coup. Like Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu is a country of great diversity and political fragmentation (although not to the same extent as Papua New Guinea).

Samoa: Samoa has universal suffrage, but only chiefs (matai) are eligible to stand for election. Nevertheless, approximately 50% of all men over the age of thirty are Matai, so it is still a fairly representative government. Many people in Samoa have increasingly come to question standards of governance. Indicative of these problems was the 2000 conviction of two cabinet ministers for the murder of a third.

Tonga: Tonga is one of the world's few remaining absolute monarchies and cannot be said to be a truly democratic state. The majority of parliamentary representatives are chosen by the king and the nobility (there are thirty-three nobles in Tonga). There are increasing efforts in Tonga to reform the political institutions to make them more representative.

Solomon Islands: Many of the institutions of state in the Solomon Islands have been criticised as being dominated by a particular ethnic group (namely the Malaitans). This dominance of Malaitans also extends to economic institutions and the security apparatus of the state. This has decreased the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of many of the other ethnic groups in the Solomon Islands and has been a contributing factor to the recent (1999-2003) conflict there.

¹³ Polity IV Country Report, Papua New Guinea 2002. See <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/polity/Png1.htm>.

c.) Civil Liberties

Regime characteristics are associated with conflict potential in myriad ways. Democratic institutions, for example, encourage a relationship between state and society that fosters pluralism, inclusion, and ultimately peaceful conflict resolution. Alternately, the lack of accountable and transparent institutions through which to channel grievances can aggravate the risk of outbursts of violent conflict. So too can the denial of civil and political liberties, such as the rights of expression, assembly and association, or the censorship of media, increase the likelihood dissenting views will be expressed through violence.

The following chart (adapted from Freedom House) ranks the relative levels of political rights and civil liberties (on a scale of one to seven, with seven being the least free) in several Pacific Island states:¹⁴

Table 4: Political Rights and Civil Liberties in Selected Pacific Island States

	Political Rights	Civil Liberties	Freedom Rating
Fiji	4	3	Partly Free
Indonesia (West Papua Province Only)	5	4	Partly Free
Kiribati	1	1	Free
Marshall Islands	1	1	Free
Micronesia	1	1	Free
Nauru	1	1	Free
Palau	1	1	Free
PNG	3	3	Partly Free
Samoa	2	2	Free
Solomon Islands	3	3	Partly Free
Tonga	5	3	Partly Free
Tuvalu	1	1	Free
Vanuatu	2	2	Free

As the chart illustrates, there are relatively high levels of respect for political and civil liberties in most of the Pacific region. Eight states received the rating “free” (Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu) while five were deemed to be “partly free” (Fiji, West Papua, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Tonga). Once again, it is the Melanesian states which are the most problematic. West Papua is of particular concern where the Indonesian government has attempted to forcefully assimilate the indigenous Papuans into Indonesia.

Across Oceania one specific problematic area is media freedom. The right of the press to criticise politicians is often rescinded in the face of controversy. One example of this can be found in Fiji with Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry’s frequent threats to regulate the media in the face of media criticism. Media censorship and controls have also been instituted in such states as Tuvalu, Samoa, Tonga, and the Cook Islands.¹⁵

¹⁴ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2004.

¹⁵ Crocombe 284-285.

d.) Corruption

Endemic corruption of political elites can result in the loss of popular confidence in state institutions and undermine their legitimacy, providing incentives for expressing grievances through extra-institutional means. Corruption can also be enormously economically damaging and often leads to other negative effects such as environmental destruction, oligarchical government, and human rights abuses. Corruption is becoming a serious problem in much of Oceania.¹⁶ There is a lack of accountability and transparency in many of the political systems. Where auditors and ombudsmen are built into the system they are often under-resourced, politically marginal, and intimidated. Attempts are made to disguise much of this corruption under the guise of traditional gift giving or reciprocity. Moreover, many politicians in the Pacific continue to control their business interests even after being elected to public office. They then redirect public contracts for their personal gain.

In Melanesia (particularly the Solomon Islands) the logging industry has earned a notorious reputation for corruption. Politicians in the Solomon Islands have often received illegal "gifts" and other kickbacks from logging companies in return for looking the other way at illegal logging practices. In Fiji, there are allegations that George Speight (the leader of the 2000 coup) stood to gain kickbacks from the felling of Fiji's lucrative mahogany forests by an American company (he was subsequently fired from his job heading the Fiji Hardwood Corporation by Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry). These practices lead to the unsustainable use of resources and the squandering of the benefits of development in return for the enrichment of a privileged few.

Much of the corruption in Oceania is done under the rubric of traditional practices (such as reciprocity and gift-giving to visitors). For example, Tonga's minister for lands (himself a high-ranking noble) often withholds his required approval on land transactions until he receives a payment.¹⁷ There is also a culture of silence in Oceania which discourages the criticism of leaders.

Tonga: Some of the most serious problems with corruption are found in Tonga. The Tongan monarchy and aristocracy have become synonymous with nepotism and corruption. The King chooses the Prime Minister himself and the current Prime Minister is none other than the King's son! The cabinet is also appointed by the king and consists of unelected officials who sit in parliament with equal status to elected representatives. When Tonga obtained satellite slots in space the rights to the slots were given over to a company owned by the King's daughter (who received significant personal gain from the deal).

Vanuatu: In Vanuatu, Dinh Van Than, an ethnic Vietnamese businessman who made significant contributions to former Prime Minister Walter Lini's political campaigns, was put in charge of Air Vanuatu. When the Vanuatu government created a commission of inquiry into corruption the commissioner's report recommended that the Minister of Finance be dismissed for shady financial dealings. The government took decisive action on this recommendation – and dismissed the commissioner!

Papua New Guinea: Corruption in Papua New Guinea has reached the point where it pervades all aspects of economic and political life. Provincialism has merely resulted in the decentralisation of corruption as the governments of the provinces of Western Highlands and Southern Highlands were suspended due to corruption, while Enga Province was warned. When the PNG ombudsman has uncovered political corruption and white-collar crime it has generally gone unprosecuted. There have been fears that the privatisation of state-owned enterprises will worsen corruption by politicians receiving economic incentives and pay outs in the capitalisation of corporations.

¹⁶ See Crocombe 512-542.

¹⁷ Crocombe 522.

V. MILITARIZATION

a.) Introduction

The size, quality, and readiness of a country's military forces affect a country's ability, not only to defend itself from external threats, but to manage internal violent conflicts, and to prevent them through having a deterrence effect. A country's degree of militarization can impact its capacity, but also potentially its inclination, to address and resolve potential conflicts through use of armed force. However, high levels of military expenditure can also indicate a privileging of the security forces in the domestic political arena, and indicate increased potential for military involvement in political affairs. Of course, considering limited spending capabilities, investments in the military can result in decreased investments in social capital and productive sectors. But so too can high levels of military spending relative to social spending, combined with high numbers of military personnel, indicate that state priorities are focused upon military rather than developmental solutions to potential crises.

b.) The Role of the Military: Strong States or Democratic Suppression?

Due to their small size, the countries of Oceania have relatively small military forces. Nevertheless, the Fiji Military Forces and the Tongan Army receive large amounts of funding relative to the size of the population. Observers such as Tongan philosopher I Futa Helu has pointed out that being as there are no external threats, the roles of armed forces can be accomplished by police. In Fiji and Tonga the military forces may undermine democratic institutions and values. In Fiji the military intervened directly to overthrow a democratically-elected prime minister in 1987. Col. Sitiveni Rabuka created the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRWU) after his 1987 coup as a kind of "praetorian guard." Elements of the CRWU took part in the 2000 coup and mutiny.

The most heavily militarised region of the Pacific has historically been Micronesia. This is due to its close proximity to Asia and its subsequent strategic importance during the cold war. The region continues to be dominated by the United States and used for its military activities. Former American territories Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands have all signed treaties of association with the United States which allow the Americans the right of strategic denial within their territorial jurisdiction, as well as the use of their territory for American military purposes. The American missile-testing base on Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands is taking on increasing significance once again with the USA's pursuit of National Missile Defence (NMD).

France's territories in the Pacific (New Caledonia and French Polynesia in particular) also heavily militarized in the 1970's and 1980's, although this militarization has decreased somewhat. During *Les Evénements* in the 1980's, French President Jacques Chirac instituted a policy of "nomadisation" under which French mobile forces were stationed all over New Caledonia. In French Polynesia, the nuclear testing programme brought a massive military presence and influx of aid.

In Papua New Guinea the Defence Forces (PNGDF) are under-funded and have not contributed to the security situation in the country. In 1997 there was a mutiny and there have been cases of PNGDF weapons being sold to criminals or to tribal forces. There have also been persistent tensions with the police forces. In 1997 the Papua New Guinea government hired mercenaries (Sandline International) to fight the war in Bougainville and arm the PNGDF. A local security firm owned by the Prime Minister's family was involved in the deal. Army Commander Brigadier General Singirok objected to the use of mercenaries and forced a change in government. It was later uncovered that a rival security company was paying Singirok.¹⁸ The Sandline Affair illustrates the ways that corruption and militarization can undermine democratic governance and stability.

¹⁸ Crocombe 573.

In states where the security forces are perceived to be dominated by one group (whether this perception is accurate or not), this can be a conflict-contributing factor. This is the case in Fiji, where the Fiji Military Forces are almost completely ethnic Fijian and are closely tied to other indigenous Fijian institutions such as the chiefly aristocracy. The Fiji Military Forces intervened in 1987 in support of "indigenous rights." This situation also exists in the Solomon Islands where both the police and the police mobile force (a paramilitary force) are viewed of as being dominated by Malaitans. During the 2000 Solomon Islands coup, army and police weaponry were often funnelled directly to the Malaita Eagle Force. Moreover, the proliferation of small arms is also a problem in the Solomon Islands due to the conflict in neighbouring Bougainville (PNG) and the relatively porous border. In New Caledonia the police and military forces are heavily dominated by Europeans and act as a coercive instrument to consolidate the rule of the French Republic.

c.) Post-Civil War Demobilisation

Both the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (Bougainville) are currently undergoing a post-war peacebuilding process. A major component of any peacebuilding enterprise is the demobilisation and disarmament of belligerent forces. In Bougainville demobilisation has been relatively successful. In the Solomon Islands there has been greater difficulty in disarming rival factions. This might be partly because the root causes of the conflict and underlying sense of insecurity of certain groups have not been properly addressed. In both the Solomon Islands and Bougainville there are potential "spoilers" to the peace process. Spoilers are groups that remain outside the process and continue their violence. In Bougainville it is the BRA (Bougainville Revolutionary Army) and in the Solomon Islands it was Harold Keke and his band of Guadalcanal militants (Keke was captured in 2003).

VI. POPULATION HETEROGENEITY

a.) Introduction

A high degree of ethnic, religious, or other diversity in a country can contribute to conflict if these groups feel that the state persecutes them or does not accommodate their aspirations. This is especially true in situations where there are high incentives for group action, such as a historical loss of group autonomy, long-standing or widening political and economic disparities between communal groups, or restrictions on cultural practices. In addition, the capacity for collective action also depends in large part upon the strength of a group's identity, and its level of political mobilization.

b.) Ethnic Diversity

Ethnic diversity and marginalization are a significant conflict-contributing factor in Oceania. Melanesia, in particular, is one of the most ethnically diverse regions on earth with approximately one third of the world's languages.

West Papua: In West Papua the indigenous (Melanesian) population has faced increasing numbers of Javanese settling in the province as a result of the Indonesian government's policy of transmigration. Transmigration is an attempt by the central government to relieve the overcrowding on Java by offering incentives for people to move to areas with a lower population density such as West Papua, Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), Sulawesi, Sumatra, etc. This influx of foreigners combined with the Indonesian government's repression of Papuan culture has disrupted the ethnic balance and led to fears of ethnocide (cultural extermination). Conflict between transmigrants and indigenous inhabitants has occurred in both West Papua and Kalimantan (Borneo). The Indonesian government's failure to recognise the ethnic diversity of its population has been a conflict contributing factor.

Papua New Guinea: In Papua New Guinea there is a stunning level of ethnic diversity. Over 900 languages are spoken in PNG with many languages numbering less than a thousand speakers. The wantok system in PNG (see above) is based on language and has resulted in much corruption and political instability. The combination of this ethnic diversity with a weak state has also directly contributed to conflict as many remote regions of PNG, such as the highlands, have experienced protracted tribal conflicts. There have also been numerous micro-nationalist and separatist movements. Ethnic difference is also one of the oft-stated reasons for the Bougainville conflict, as Bougainvilleans have closer ethnic ties to the people of Western Province in the Solomon Islands than they do to other Papua New Guineans.

Solomon Islands: The Solomon Islands also have a very ethnically diverse population with many languages spoken (officially sixty-seven). In the Solomon Islands ethnic diversity also often corresponds to racial diversity with people from Western Province generally having very dark skin, people from Central and South Malaita medium dark skin, North Malaitans (Lauans) medium dark skin and fair hair, and Guadalcanalese fair skin. These racial differences have had the effect of intensifying ethnic divisions. There are also Polynesian communities in some areas of the country.

Much of the recent civil war in the Solomon Islands could be said to be about the distribution of resources among the various ethnic groups. Malaitans are the largest ethnic grouping and they dominate the police, military, politics and the economy. This has engendered resentment among other ethnic groups. The violence in the Solomons began when Guadalcanalese landowners demanded that Malaitan settlers hand back their land. The two main antagonists in the conflict were the Malaitans (Malaita Eagle Force or MEF) and Guadalcanalese (Isatabu Freedom Movement or IFM). There is also a nationalist movement in the Western Province that seeks one of three options: 1) increasing autonomy, 2) independence, or 3) independence as a part of an independent Bougainville.

Vanuatu: Vanuatu also has a high degree of ethnic diversity with approximately 100 local languages spoken. During the period immediately after independence there were separatist demands in the north of the country.

New Caledonia: New Caledonia is a fairly multi-cultural state with large indigenous Melanesian (Kanak - 44%), and European (34%) populations, as well as Polynesian (Wallisian and Tahitian -12%), Ni-Vanuatu, (1%), Vietnamese (1%), Javanese (3%), and others (including Chinese, Arabs, etc. - approximately 5%) minorities.¹⁹ Political competition is largely centred on the Kanaks and Europeans. The Kanaks have sought the independence of New Caledonia and increased Kanak economic and political power. Currently much of the land has been expropriated from the Kanaks by Europeans. Kanaks have also faced cultural persecution but have managed to maintain a distinct culture despite these obstacles. The Europeans in New Caledonia generally support remaining within the French Republic. Many of the people from other ethnic groups were brought into New Caledonia to work in the Nickel mining industry. These other groups are generally against independence though there is now a pro-Independence party of Wallisians and Tahitians (the Rallée Démocratique Oceanienne). The economy in New Caledonia has been dominated by Europeans. Within the Kanak and European community there is also significant diversity with approximately twenty-nine Kanak languages spoken and divisions within the European community between the Caldoches (descendants of the original European settlers) and the more recent European arrivals.

Fiji: Fiji is essentially an ethnically bi-polar state with two main, roughly equal, ethnic groups. These are the Indian descendants of indentured labourers and economic migrants (43.7%) and the Fijian indigenous Melanesian people (50.8%).²⁰ The demographic situation in Fiji has fluctuated with the Indo-Fijians being predominant between the 1940's and 1987 and the indigenous Fijians being predominant after 1987 (as a result of the large levels of Indian emigration following that coup). Both groups have remained relatively distinct with different languages, religions, and cultural practices. Ethnic appeals have been a part of Fijian politics for many years. There is a tension in Fiji between the aspirations of indigenous Fijians for a cultural and political homeland and the demands by Indo-Fijians for equal rights. Every time a government perceived as being "Indian" has been elected, there has been an extra-political intervention by military or terrorist forces in declared defence of the paramouncy of indigenous Fijians. The polarisation between Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians has further increased since the 2000 coup. The Fijians retain ownership of at least 83% of the land while Indians have predominated in the professions and in the retail sector.

Guam: In Guam the indigenous Chamorro population (43%) has been reduced to a minority by immigrants including Filipinos (22%), and "Europeans" (i.e. white Americans -14%).²¹ Guam has experienced centuries of colonisation under the Spanish and Americans and the indigenous Chamorro culture has been eroded. There is an ethno-nationalist movement in Guam which seeks greater recognition of indigenous culture.

Federated States of Micronesia: The Federated States of Micronesia have a degree of ethnic diversity as each state (Chuuk, Kosrae, Yap, and Pohnpei) has its own distinct languages, as well as dialects. These ethnic groups have coexisted in relative peace but divisions exist. This diversity has spawned many micronationalist movements seeking either greater decentralisation or independence. For example, there is a movement to split the district of Faichuk (made up of eight islands) from the state of Chuuk to form either a separate state within FSM or an independent state. Faichuk itself is more populous than Yap and Kosrae combined.²² It is difficult in states with a high degree of population heterogeneity, such as FSM and Papua New Guinea, to know where to draw the line in terms of the right of self-determination and territorial units.

¹⁹ Crocombe 696. Wallisians originate in the French colony of Wallis and Futuna.

²⁰ Fiji Island Bureau of Statistics, *Fiji Facts and Figures*, (Suva, Fiji: Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 1 July 2002).

²¹ Crocombe 693.

²² Pacific Islands Development Program, "Faichuk leaders want out of Chuuk, FSM," *Pacific Islands Report* (31 January, 2003).

Other: Elsewhere in the Pacific there are ethno-nationalist movements in Hawaii (indigenous Hawaiians), New Zealand (Maori – Polynesian indigenous people), the Torres Strait Islands (a self-governing, Melanesian population within Australia), and on Easter Island/Rapanui (indigenous Polynesians).

c.) Religious Diversity

Oceania is very much a predominately Christian region. Within the Christian churches in the Pacific, however, there are a bewildering array of splinter groups and “new” churches. In Samoa there has been some sporadic, low-level violence and intimidation between adherents of the new churches and established churches. In Fiji the Fijian population is almost completely Christian while the Indian population is about 85% Hindu and 15% Muslim. There is not always respect for Fiji’s religious diversity and after the 1987 coups there was an enforced ban on Sunday activities for a time. Of course, ethnic and religious issues are closely intertwined in Fiji and during times of ethnic conflict and unrest attacks on religious institutions such as Hindu temples and Muslim mosques have occurred.

Molucca Islands: The greatest religious conflict in the region exists in the Molucca Islands and West Papua where the predominately Muslim settlers have come into conflict with the predominately Christian indigenous inhabitants. There have been particularly high levels of religious conflict and violence between Islamic militias and Christian groups in the Molucca Islands. The Molucca Islands are approximately 40.5% Christian and 59% Muslim.²³ Religious tensions have existed in the Molucca Islands for many years but things significantly worsened in the past twenty years as Muslim settlers from elsewhere in Indonesia continued to arrive and the national identity of the Indonesian state became increasingly Muslim. Violence reached new levels when in mid-2000 a Java-based fundamentalist Islamic militia, Laskar Jihad, dispatched several thousand fighters (armed and trained by the Indonesian armed forces) to the Molucca Islands.²⁴ There is also evidence that these Muslim groups are foreign-trained and supported by international terrorist organisations such as the Al Qaeda network.

d.) Minorities at Risk

The Minorities at Risk (MAR) Project at the University of Maryland has assembled a wide range of data on ethnic groups worldwide that have been subjected to various kinds of cultural, political, and/or economic discrimination. Minority Groups are identified by the MAR Project as being “at risk” if the country in which they reside has a population greater than 500,000, the group itself has a population larger than 100,000 (or one percent of the country population), and it meets at least one of four criteria.²⁵ These four criteria are: that the group is subject to political, economic or cultural discrimination; that the group is disadvantaged from past political, economic or cultural discrimination; that the group is politically, economically or culturally advantaged, and that advantage is being challenged; that the group supports political organizations advocating greater group rights. Based on these criteria, the MAR project has identified the following groups as Minorities at Risk :

²³ Global IDP Project.

²⁴ Global IDP Project.

²⁵ See the Minorities at Risk Project, <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/>.

Table 5: Minorities at Risk

	Group	Group Type
Eastern Indonesia	Papuans	Indigenous ²⁶
Fiji:	Indians and Native Fijians	Communal Contenders ²⁷
Papua New Guinea:	Bougainvilleans	Ethnonationalist ²⁸

²⁶ These are “conquered descendants of earlier inhabitants of a region who live mainly in conformity with traditional social, economic, and cultural customs that are sharply distinct from those of dominant groups.”

²⁷ Communal contenders are culturally distinct groups holding or seeking a share of state power.

²⁸ In this context, ethnonationalist groups are distinct groups with a regional concentration that have a history of political autonomy and that have supported political movements for autonomy at some point since 1945.

VII. DEMOGRAPHIC STRESS

The size, density, distribution and composition of a country's population can contribute greatly to the potential for violent conflict. Changes in these factors, such as rapid rates of growth and urbanization, can also accelerate the conflict development process through heightening competition for access to physical and social resources, due to increasing scarcity, growing inequality, and environmental degradation.

The age composition of a population is a powerful element in its tendencies to violence. Evidence suggests that the younger the population and the higher the level of unemployment, for example, the greater the potential for violence. Young, unemployed populations can also be political volatile constituents, placing far less trust in political institutions and patterns of authority.

A high rate of urbanisation may also put particular pressures on the infrastructure of the state. People flee underdeveloped rural areas for the supposed opportunities of urban areas but once they arrive in the city conditions may be worse than those they faced in their towns and villages. In particular, there is a lower degree of food security. Moreover, urbanisation, along with other forms of internal migration, may act as a catalyst for conflict as outsiders encroach on the land rights of local people. The following chart adapted from the South Pacific Commission Demography/Population Program provides a range of population indicators for the countries of the Pacific:²⁹

Table 6: Pacific Island Populations 2004

	Last Census	Population at Last Census	Population Density (km ²)	Estimated Annual Population Growth Rate (2004-2015) %	Urban Population %	Annual Urban Intercensal Growth Rate %
Melanesia	N/A	7,444,100³⁰	14	N/A	19	2.9
Fiji Islands	1996	775 077	46	0.7	46	2.6
New Caledonia	1996	196 836	13	1.9	60	2.8
Papua New Guinea	2000	5 190 786	12	2.2	13	2.8
Solomon Is.	1999	409 042	16	2.3	16	4.3
Vanuatu		186 678	18	2.7	21	4.2
Micronesia	N/A	536 100³¹	167	N/A	65	1.6
Federated States of Micronesia	2000	107 008	131	1.2	21	2.4
Guam	2000	154 805	307	2.4	93	N/A
Kiribati	1999	84 494	115	1.3	43	5.2
Marshall Is.	2002	50 840	306	1.6	65	1.6
Nauru	2002	10 065	481	1.0	100	0.3

²⁹ South Pacific Commission Demography/Population Program, Pacific Island Populations 2004, see www.spc.org.

³⁰ Population estimate 2004.

³¹ Population estimate 2004

Northern Marianas Is.	2000	69 221	166	3.1	90	3.4
Palau	2000	19 129	42	2.0	81	2.2
Polynesia	N/A	635 700³²	79	N/A	41	1.4
American Samoa	2000	57 291	313	2.0	66	3.7
Cook Islands	2001	18 027	59	-1.3	68	-1.9
French Polynesia	2002	244 830	71	1.8	52	1.6
Niue	2001	1 788	6	-3.8	34	-4.3
Pitcairn Is.	N/A	54	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Samoa	2001	176 710	62	0.9	22	1.3
Tokelau	2001	1 537	125	0.0	0.0	N/A
Tonga	1996	97 784	151	-0.3	32	0.8
Tuvalu	2002	9 561	369	0.4	47	1.4
Wallis and Futuna	2003	14 944	105	0.5	0.0	0.0

Micronesia: As the above chart illustrates, population pressures are particularly acute in the Micronesian sub-region. Micronesia suffers from high levels of population growth combined with a scarcity of resources. This resource scarcity stems from the fact that most Micronesian islands are coral atolls with very little land area and only two metres or less of topsoil (see “environmental stresses”). Moreover, Micronesia already suffers from very high population densities (an average of 167 people/km² but as high as 307/km² in Guam and 481/km² in Nauru) and levels of urbanisation (an average of 65% of the population is urban). One area facing such intense population pressures is South Tarawa, the capital (atoll) of Kiribati. South Tarawa has a current estimated annual growth rate of 5.2% per annum, meaning that its population will double in only 13 years! Gerald Haberkom, of the South Pacific Commission Population Program, concludes: “Already experiencing enormous population-resource pressures at present, it is quite inconceivable of how South Tarawa’s economy, its society and environment will be able to cope with an additional 36,700 people in nine years.”³³

Similarly, the Federated States of Micronesia are also facing serious demographic pressures. FSM is a small island state consisting mostly of coral atolls. Population pressures on atolls are great as there is little land, poor soil, and few sources of fresh water. Waste is also always an issue. Chuuk state has one of the highest population densities in the world with more than 1000 people per square mile and over half of the total population of FSM.³⁴ Unemployment and poverty are also serious problems in Chuuk with 25% of the population having no formal education and a rate of only 38% labour force participation (in both the subsistence and remunerative sectors).³⁵ FSM also has an extremely young population with 43.5% being under the age of 15.³⁶ Large numbers of uneducated, unemployed young people living in poverty and high population density is a recipe for conflict. There are already significant crime rates in Chuuk. Population pressures are the most significant conflict risk factors in Micronesia. However, there is little history of recent conflict in these societies, so the potential for violence is relatively low.

Other: Most countries in Oceania have populations that are fairly young. As this population ages it will dramatically raise demands on the education system, as well as doubling the

³² Population estimate 2004.

³³ Gerald Haberkom, *Current Pacific Population Dynamics and Recent Trends*, (Nouméa, New Caledonia: South Pacific Commission, 2004).

³⁴ South Pacific Commission Demography/Population Program, *Federated States of Micronesia Population Profile*, (Nouméa, New Caledonia, South Pacific Commission, 1997).

³⁵ South Pacific Commission, *Population Profile: Federated...*

³⁶ South Pacific Commission, *Population Profile: Federated...*

demand for employment in one of the poorest countries in the region. Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, and Papua New Guinea all have relatively high rates of population growth. This population growth has the potential of increasing conflict over already poorly distributed resources. Moreover, the Melanesian countries lack the high rates of external migration of Micronesia and Polynesia that help to serve as a "safety valve" for rapid population growth. However, this pattern of external migration found especially in states associated with larger countries (such as the Cook Islands association with New Zealand, or the Palauan association with the United States) also represents a "brain drain." Although this brain drain corresponds with a loss of human capital, the remuneration of funds from external migrants to their home countries also represents a significant economic contribution.

VIII. ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

The linkages between economic performance and potential for violent conflict are strong. Low or declining incomes, high inflation, exchange rate fluctuation or collapse, and volatile levels of foreign investment significantly impact material living standards, and can create or aggravate dissatisfaction with government performance, undermining government credibility. High levels of economic inequality contribute to social fragmentation, declining state legitimacy, and can cause scapegoating of economically privileged minorities. Low involvement in international trade is also associated with higher risk of state failure, given that the conditions that inhibit high levels of international trade and foreign investment (such as rampant corruption and poor infrastructure) also contribute to the risk of political crises. Poverty and the failure of a state to improve the welfare of its citizens can lead to increasing marginalisation of people from the state. If the benefits of development are distributed in an unequal manner this can be a particularly strong conflict contributing factor. The following chart includes vital economic indicators for the region:

Table 7: Economic Indicators (all statistics 2002 World Bank)

	GNI (US \$)	GNI Per Capita (US\$)	Per	GDP Growth (annual%)	Debt (US\$)	Aid Per Capita (US\$)
Fiji	1.7 billion	2 130		4.1	200.6 million	41.4
French Polynesia	3.9 billion (1998)	16 (1998)	920	6.2 (1998)	---	1 741
Marshall Islands	126.3 million	2 380		4.0	---	1 177.7
Federated States of Micronesia	240.5 million	1 970		0.8	---	915.4
New Caledonia	3.2 billion (1998)	15 (1998)	750	-3.2 (1998)	---	1 472
Palau	136.4 million	6,820		3.0	--	1 562.5
Papua New Guinea	2.8 billion	530		-0.5	2.4 billion	37.8
Samoa	251.3 million	1 430		1.9	167.8 million	214.5
Solomon Islands	256.0 million	580		-2.7	129.7 million	59.4
Tonga	145.6 million	1 440		1.6	49.0 million	---
Vanuatu	221.1 million	1 070		-0.3	54.8 million	133.5

As the chart illustrates, the countries of Oceania are fairly poor countries in terms of GDP per capita; however they don't experience the same absolute poverty as many other developing countries because they enjoy a high degree of food security. The poorest countries are those of Melanesia. Inequality is high in many countries such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, and Tonga. Political instability and conflict have a greatly detrimental effect on economic development and the standard of living. Both Fiji and the Solomon Islands have endured sharp economic declines since their respective coups in 2000. Another noteworthy aspect of the statistics above is the high levels of aid of each of the French colonies, as well as the Micronesian countries (such as Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands). This aid has increased material standards of living but has also contributed to economic dependence.

Papua New Guinea: Papua New Guinea has experienced poor economic performance despite abundant resource endowments and high levels of foreign aid (particularly from Australia). PNG has also suffered from a significant debt burden. This poor economic performance has meant that the state has lacked macroeconomic stability and the means to provide basic levels of development and/or security. This, in turn, has had the effect of eroding government legitimacy and has contributed to the breakdown of the rule of law.

New Caledonia: In New Caledonia there is a significant development gap between the urban centre Nouméa and *La Brousse* (the bush, or rural New Caledonia). Almost all development is centred on Nouméa. This is changing as a result of the policy of “rebalancing” the economy, enshrined in the 1998 Nouméa Accord. This includes building Koné in the Northern Province as an urban centre. There is also a striking ethnic dimension to inequality in New Caledonia. On average, Europeans are much wealthier than Kanaks. Moreover, the nickel industry has been dominated by the Europeans. One of the most visible signs of this inequality is the Kanaks and Wallisians living in the Vallée de Tir tenements under the shadow of the massive Donaimbo nickel smelter.

Fiji: The perceived economic dominance of the Indo-Fijians has fuelled Fijian nationalist demands for economic equality. Fiji has a long-standing program of affirmative action for ethnic Fijians. Much of Fiji remains underdeveloped and dominated by foreign economic interests. Despite the indigenous Fijian perception of Indo-Fijian wealth, there are also significant numbers of Indo-Fijians living in poverty. As with many other states in the region, a high percentage of Fiji’s top industries (such as tourism and gold mining) are foreign-owned.

IX. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

As with overall levels of economic development, poor levels of human development correlate strongly with higher risk of violent conflict and state failure. The lack of, or decline in, public services such as health care, education, safe water and sanitation indicate weak state capacity to provide and allocate vital services. This can decrease popular confidence in the state, leading to political instability and social unrest. So too can unmet expectations regarding educational opportunities or other opportunities for social advancement increase discontent and the likelihood and severity of civil strife. Low levels of investment in human capital can also hinder the development of a skilled labour force, necessary for creating livelihoods and increasing incomes, and so on in a downward spiral. The following chart compares three human development indicators across the most populous states and territories of the region:

Table 8: Human Development³⁷

	Life Expectancy (years)	Infant Mortality Rate (per 1000 live births)	Literacy (% of ages 15 and above)
Fiji	69.5	17.0	93.7
French Polynesia	73.7	6.9	98.0
Guam	77.8	9.0	99.0
Marshall Islands	---	54.0	93,7
Federated States of Micronesia	68.6	20.0	89
New Caledonia	73.6	---	91
Palau	---	24.0	92
Papua New Guinea	57.2	70.0	66
Samoa	69.4	20.0	99.7
Solomon Islands	69.3	20.0	N/A
Tonga	71.3	16.0	98.5
Vanuatu	68.5	34.0	53

As this chart illustrates, the Melanesian states of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu have the lowest levels of human development while colonial dependencies such as New Caledonia and Guam have the highest. Many of the states in the Pacific lack the resources to achieve high levels of human development and there is a heavy reliance on foreign aid. However, literacy rates are very high across the region with the exception of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. The primary and secondary education systems in these states are inadequate. In both Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands strained resources allow only a small percentage of the population to achieve even secondary education.

³⁷ Life expectancy and infant mortality statistics World Bank, 2002 except infant mortality rate French Polynesia and Guam: South Pacific Commission Demography/Population Program 2004. Literacy statistics from the CIA World Factbook, www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook.

Papua New Guinea: The lowest levels of human development in the Pacific are found in Papua New Guinea. In Papua New Guinea the government has been unable to provide even basic services (most importantly providing security for its citizens). There are certain areas of the country (parts of the highlands) where the government has essentially completely withdrawn its presence due to localised tribal fighting

X. ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS

Of particular concern here, are those environmental factors that have contributed either indirectly or directly, or risk doing so, to the potential for violent conflict. The degradation and depletion of natural resources – particularly renewable resources, such as freshwater, arable land and forests -- can generate a variety of effects that underlie social or political instability, and increase the potential for conflict. Reduced stocks of natural resources increase scarcity, heighten competition, and can result in increasingly unequal distribution of resources between communal groups or regions. The unequal allocation of resources in a climate of scarcity, or the capture of resources by dominant groups, can create or exacerbate cleavages within a society, creating incentives for violent conflict. Environmental degradation or depletion can also result in constrained economic productivity and growth, causing increased poverty and loss of livelihoods, leading to forced displacement or migration into ecologically-marginalized areas. Environmental factors interact powerfully with various other factors, including population pressures in the form of population growth and shifts in population density.

The volcanic islands and coral atolls of the Oceania region are fragile biotas that are extremely vulnerable to environmental change. This environmental change can take many forms. The introduction of alien species has the potential to destroy the delicate balance of island ecosystems.

Coral atolls are in a particularly precarious position, existing at sea level with only about a meter of topsoil. There are few sources of fresh water on atolls, and waste disposal is a significant problem. Moreover, these islands are directly threatened by the rising sea levels caused by global warming. Global warming also has the potential to increase the frequency and strength of dangerous weather such as storm surges, and hurricanes. This increase in storm activity may speed coastal erosion (especially when combined with other activities which contribute to erosion such as the harvesting of mangroves). Approximately forty island microstates have united to form the Small Island States (SIS) international coalition. This group is concerned with lobbying at the international level in order to prevent and mitigate the extreme effects of global warming on small island states.

Biodiversity both on land and sea are threatened by maldevelopment. Coral reefs are vulnerable to such things as increased water temperatures (symptomatic of global warming) silt, pollution, boat anchors, and the harvesting of organisms for the tropical fish trade (often utilising cyanide to stun the fish). On land, logging is a serious problem. The high value of tropical hardwood, combined with weak regulatory regimes and corruption has resulted in the rapid deforestation of the tropical rainforest of many areas in Oceania such as parts of the Solomon Islands. This deforestation deprives many species of their habitat and reduces biodiversity. Biodiversity is the living capital of Oceania and the reduction of biodiversity directly threatens the livelihood of many indigenous peoples.

Often the relatively poor states of the region are pressured by developed countries to accept environmental risks in return for economic returns. For example, in 2002 there was a major controversy in the Solomon Islands after the government agreed to accept toxic waste from Taiwan. Moreover, Distant Water Fishing Nations (DWFN) such as Russia, China, and Japan operate major fleets in the region. They purchase the rights to fish in the very extensive Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ's) and territorial waters of states in the region. This sale of fishing rights earns foreign exchange but also depletes local resources. The DWFN's operate a completely mobile system of harvesting (and sometimes production) and there is little incentive for them to conserve resources (particularly on the under-regulated high seas). There are indications that once-plentiful fisheries resources (including migrant species such as Tuna) are near the point of collapse.

Nauru provides us with a sort of environmental parable. Nauru gained great riches (at one point having one of the highest per/capita GDP's in the world) by allowing almost unrestricted mining of its ample phosphate deposits. These deposits are now exhausted and much of the

proceeds from the mining have been lost through poor financial management. The natural environment in Nauru is now one of the most severe on earth with a dry, lunar-like landscape and intense heat. Nauru is seeking to remedy this situation through obtaining new sources of revenue (including housing Afghan refugees at one point), compensation, or even a new island to purchase and inhabit.

The potential for conflict to be caused (or accelerated) by environmental stress is fairly high in Oceania. Environmental damage often disproportionately affects the poor and marginalised. Mining and forestry have displaced and put other pressures on the indigenous peoples of Papua New Guinea and West Papua. This, in turn, has contributed to resentment towards the central government and has fomented resistance and conflict. Moreover, land disputes relating to development projects are a frequent source of conflict in Oceania. As population pressures increase in Micronesia, competition over scarce resources will also increase as will the potential for conflict.

XI. INTERNATIONAL LINKAGES

a.) Introduction

The form of a country's engagement with outside actors – bilaterally with other countries or multilaterally through international or regional forums – can serve to reduce or, in some cases, contribute to the potential for violent conflict. On the one hand, international linkages can contribute positively to the mitigation of both intrastate and interstate conflicts, if external actors perform in a facilitating or supportive fashion, and have the operational capacity to contribute meaningfully in terms of mediation and support for reconciliation efforts. Constructive engagement – whether through diplomatic, political, commercial, trade or cultural relations – can contribute to interdependency and shared vested interests, and creates opportunity for a wide range of support mechanisms. Participation in international regimes and organizations can also help decrease security risks by codifying broad rules and processes by which to resolve disputes peacefully.

On the other hand, weak linkages or harmful engagement with partisan actors can contribute profoundly to the potential for the outbreak or escalation of conflict. Countries with fewer diplomatic, political, commercial, trade or cultural linkages with neighbouring states, as well as international and regional organisations, and are less likely to profit from constructive engagement with outside actors, in areas such as developmental assistance, mediation, or support in peace processes. In addition, neighbouring countries might also contribute directly or indirectly to armed conflict by harbouring or supporting armed protagonists of a civil conflict. Furthermore, the interventions of neighbouring or regional actors can contribute to the potential of a civil conflict becoming inter-state or regional in scale.

Oceania has more international organisations per capita than any other region in the world. This well-developed system of international linkages acts as a confidence-building measure in limiting the risk of disputes being resolved through violence. The states of Oceania also maintain a presence internationally, though this is somewhat limited by budgetary constraints. Many of the strongest bilateral international relationships of the states and territories of Oceania are asymmetrical, whereby a developed country is contributing aid and attempt to exercise influence over the less-developed and smaller states of the region. Australia is now taking an increasing role in the region to combat what it perceives as an "arc of instability," particularly in Melanesia. Australian security forces have been dispatched to both the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea in the past few years.

b.) Bilateral Relations and Disputes

As noted in the CIA world Factbook (where the definition of international disputes includes a wide variety of situations that range from traditional bilateral boundary disputes to unilateral claims of one sort or another, resource disputes, geopolitical questions, or irredentist issues), there are several bilateral disputes in Oceania.

Table 9: Bilateral Disputes³⁸

KIRIBATI
Ownership of Line Islands and Phoenix Islands disputed between Kiribati and the USA
MARSHALL ISLANDS
Claims US Territory of Wake.
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
Border incursions by Organisasi Papua Merdeka guerrillas from Papua province of Indonesia. Refugee flows from Papua province. Arms and other material aid flows from Western Province, Solomon Islands to Bougainville.
SOLOMON ISLANDS
Territorial claim over Bougainville in Papua New Guinea.
VANUATU
Maritime border dispute with New Caledonia (France) over Mathew and Hunter Islands.

c.) Transnational Crime

Oceania has increasingly been used as a transit point in transnational criminal enterprises such as drug smuggling and money laundering. Several countries in the region (most recently the Cook Islands and Nauru) have been blacklisted by the OECD as being money laundering centers.

³⁸ CIA World Factbook, <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>, accessed on August 16, 2004.

XII. CONCLUSION

The potential for open armed and organized violent conflict in Oceania remains relatively low but there are several areas of concern. Melanesia is particularly vulnerable due to its histories of armed conflict, militarization, political instability, weak economies, and population heterogeneity. Despite these factors being present, the risk of conflict in Melanesia is still relatively low compared to conflict prone regions elsewhere (such as the Balkans, Middle East, and Central Africa). The greatest risk for violence within Melanesia is eastern Indonesia where ethno-nationalist challenges to the Indonesian central government have been met with zero tolerance. Micronesia has its own set of problems stemming from its environmental context. These include severe resource scarcities, population pressures, and ecological vulnerability. These problems are unlikely to lead to conflict in the short term but if they are not addressed they could become potential risk factors in the medium to long term. Perhaps the greatest contributing factor to conflict risk in Oceania is its very low international profile. If conflict risk situations go unaddressed then they could potentially develop into violence.

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