



Solomon Islands Risk Assessment Brief

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**Prepared By:
Hila Olyan
Phoebe Smith
Ruth Stephen
Matthew Case**

Executive Summary

After discovering alluvial gold on Guadalcanal in 1568, Spanish explorer Alvaro de Mendana, believing he had found the source of King Solomon's great wealth, fittingly named his findings the Isles of Solomon.¹ The islands, which eventually became a British colony, were a major battleground between American and Japanese forces during World War II. In 1942, the Japanese navy occupied the island building air and sea bases to interrupt supply routes between the US, Australia, and New Zealand. The Americans later responded and after a protracted confrontation, the Japanese were forced to withdraw.

An effect of the American occupation was the dissemination of emancipatory rhetoric among Solomon Islanders spurring an independence movement against the British. Led mainly by Malaitan soldiers, the movement involved non-compliance and civil disobedience. Over the following three decades the move toward independence was incremental but steady, culminating in the 1974 constitution and the declaration of independence in 1978.

In the late 1990s, violence erupted between Guadalcanalese and Malaitan citizens on the main island of Guadalcanal. At the root of the conflict was the anger felt by some Guadalcanal leaders over what they considered to be unfair land policies. Rival militias were formed and by 1998 the country dissolved into violence. The Isatabu Freedom Movement, ostensibly representing the Guadalcanalese, forced approximately 20,000 Malaitans off Guadalcanal Island. In 2000, after the failure of several reconciliation ceremonies, the Malaitan Eagle Force abducted Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu and forced him to resign for failing to respond adequately to this violence.

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) arrived in 2003, having been formally requested by the Governor-General. RAMSI has had a profound effect in shaping the Solomon Islands' recent history, as it has focused on stabilizing the country by improving governance. However, there remains a moderate potential for the re-emergence of violent conflict due to a number of factors including: failure to adequately address the root causes of the 1998-2003 conflict, an unstable and ineffective government, an unsustainable economy, the effects of climate change and natural disasters, poor human development, demographic stress, and the lack of a clear exit strategy for RAMSI. The country lacks the capacity to effectively deal with economic and environmental crises, and left unchecked this has the strong potential to result in renewed violent conflict.

Stakeholders

Main Actors:	Effect:	Interest/Grievance
Prime Minister Derek Sikua, Liberal Party	+	Came to power peacefully in 2007 with overwhelming support. He is focused on addressing the needs of rural citizens and achieving reconciliation and social harmony. ²
Isatabu Freedom Movement	-	First emerged in Oct 1998 violently protesting against migrants from other parts of the Solomon Islands (S.I.) coming to Guadalcanal taking over land and jobs ³ . Has since been disarmed.
Malaitan Eagle Force	-	Emerged shortly after IFM to respond and retaliate. ⁴ Has since been disarmed.
Multinational Logging Companies	-	Affect the economy, environment and politics of S.I. Have faced many allegations of bribery, corruption and disregard for environmental laws. ⁵
Australia	+	Major aid donor (\$246.2 million in 2009) Primary contributor to RAMSI. ⁶ Total annual trade: AUS\$ 74 million, 700 Australian residents live in S.I. ⁷
New Zealand	+	ODA of ~\$36 million to S.I. ; New Zealand's largest bilateral development assistance program. ⁸
Fiji	0	Fiji has S.I.'s largest expatriate community, also sizable Fijian community in Honiara ⁹
Papua New Guinea	-	Bougainville separatist conflict (1989-1996) had risk of spreading to S.I.
China	0	Largest S.I. export recipient (51%), roughly 1000 Chinese people live in S.I. ¹⁰
Taiwan (ROC)	0	Solomon Islands is one of 23 countries that recognizes Republic of China, Taiwan offers S.I. development assistance, while S.I. "assists Taiwan to participate in the United Nations and other regional or international organizations." ¹¹
NGO's (especially UNICEF)	+	Delivered humanitarian assistance after tsunamis of 2007 and 2010 ¹²

Key Indicators

History of Armed Conflict : MODERATE ↑

Stabilizing Factors:

- Peace Treaties and Accords : Honiara Peace Accord¹³ (1999) and Townsville Peace Agreement¹⁴ (October 2000), Marau Peace Agreement¹⁵ (February 2001). Signed by ethnic factions but not observed until RAMSI arrived.

↑ Since 2003, RAMSI has been helping restore law and order, strengthen government institutions, reduce corruption and re-invigorate the economy.¹⁶

↑ April 2009, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to investigate causes of violence and human rights abuses from 1998-2003.¹⁷

Destabilizing Factors:

↓ 1998 ethnic conflict emerged between Guadalcanalese and Malaitan when the IFM, forced ~ 20,000 Malaitans off Guadalcanal Island. MEF formed resulting in 4 years of armed conflict and more than 100 deaths.¹⁸

- Malaitan Eagle Force staged a coup in June 2000, forcing the Prime Minister to resign.¹⁹

↓ Hundreds of child soldiers fought in the 1998-2003 conflict. Many became gang members afterward.²⁰

↓ Post-election riots in April 2006 countered advances made toward peace since 2003.²¹

- November 2009, a riot at a football match between teams from Malaita and Honiara.²²

Assessment: Solomon Islands is still recovering from the effects of ethnic violence from 1998-2003. Tensions still exist but violence has been limited.

Governance and Political Instability: HIGH ↑

Stabilizing Factors:

- Universal suffrage for citizens 18 years of age and older.²³
- 2006 election was considered free and fair by Australian observers;²⁴ however, perceptions still led to riots.
- ↑ The press enjoys a high level of freedom (Freedom House score of 30);²⁵ World Bank ranks Solomon Islands moderately high in categories of voice and accountability (54.3 percentile) and political stability (49.8 percentile).²⁶
- Prime Minister Derek Sikua has introduced legislation aimed at strengthening the role of political parties and pre-election coalitions; however, it is unlikely to pass before the 2010 elections.²⁷
- ↑ RAMSI has trained more than 2000 public servants.²⁸
- ↑ People's survey 2007 finds 90 % of Solomon Islanders support the presence of RAMSI²⁹

Destabilizing Factors:

- Legal system is widely disregarded. Has not accepted ICJ jurisdiction.³⁰
- Legislative comprised mostly of independents 60.3 %, national party 6.9 %, PAP 6.3 %, SIPRA 6.3 %, Liberal 5%.
- ↑ 10 governments in 23 years with 7 prime ministers. (Only 2 stayed in power for the full 4-year term of parliament.)³¹
- Presidential election to take place before August 2010. Electoral rolls are not well maintained and a scheduled registration drive has yet to begin.³²
- Each election, around 50% of MPs are new, and returning MPs often switch parties. This has contributed to a history of unpredictable elections and post-election violence.
- There are no female MPs, despite campaigns to reserve 10 seats in parliament for women.³³
- World Bank rankings say the Solomon Islands suffers from poor government effectiveness (21.3 percentile), regulatory quality (8.2 percentile), rule of law (24.4 percentile) and control of corruption (42.5 percentile).³⁴
- Lack of legal information about land ownership exacerbates prevalent land disputes³⁵

Assessment: The government of Solomon Islands is highly unstable preventing effective political institutions. Corruption and disregard for the rule of law further contribute to political instability.

Militarization: LOW •

Stabilizing Factors:

- ↑ RAMSI provides security for the islands.³⁶
- ↑ In 2007, RAMSI was successfully scaled back to 303 police officers, 197 civilian technical advisers and 72 military advisers from 15 countries in the region.³⁷
- ↑ RAMSI is rebuilding/training the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force, which was disarmed and disbanded due to its role in the 2003 conflict. 806 members of the force have been trained in Use of Force model which addresses human rights issues.³⁸
- ↑ August 2003, 90–95 per cent of civilian small arms had been turned in through a RAMSI-sponsored amnesty³⁹.
- ↑ "Weapons Free Village Campaign," a voluntary program implemented in 2002 in roughly 1,000 villages,⁴⁰ has strong grass-roots support and has helped to foster a "social stigma" around gun ownership⁴¹.

Destabilizing Factors:

- A small but vocal minority of Solomon Islanders feel that RAMSI's heavy military presence is no longer needed and resent RAMSI's continued presence and immunity to certain Solomon Island laws.⁴²
- ↓ In November 2009 the Solomon Islands parliament noted that, "It has been variously suggested that [...] RAMSI has subverted the role of the Solomon Islands government and in the process compromised the [country's] sovereignty."⁴³
- There is no clear exit strategy for RAMSI.⁴⁴

Assessment: RAMSI provides security for the Solomon Islands. Successful removal of small arms and retraining of the RSIPF are key stabilizing factors; however, without an exit or transition strategy for RAMSI, long term stability is uncertain.

Population Heterogeneity: MODERATE •

Stabilizing:

- Ethnicity: Melanesian 94.5%, Polynesian 3%, Micronesian 1.2%, other 1.1%, unspecified 0.2%⁴⁵

Destabilizing:

- Religion: Church of Melanesia - 32.8%, Roman Catholic - 19%, South Seas Evangelical - 17%, Seventh-Day Adventist - 11.2%, United Church - 10.3%, Christian Fellowship Church - 2.4%, other Christian - 4.4%, others - 2.4%, unspecified - 0.3%, none - 0.2%.⁴⁶
- There are 87 indigenous languages including Melanesian Pidgin English which is used predominantly.⁴⁷ Though English is an official language it is spoken by only 1-2% of the population.⁴⁸
- Solomon Islanders are racially diverse. People from Western Province have the darkest skin tone, people from Central and South Malaita have medium dark skin, North Malaitans (Lauans) medium dark skin and fair hair, and Guadalcanalese are the fairest.⁴⁹
- ↓ Animosity toward local Chinese diaspora population existent. This was manifested in the April 2006 post election riots where the Chinatown was "destroyed."⁵⁰ Demonstrators claim that members of the Chinese population have been involved in bribing politicians over access to primary resource industry⁵¹.

Assessment: The population of the Solomon Islands is very diverse, which is enhanced by the cultural emphasis on allegiance to one's "wantok" or ethno-linguistic group.

Demographic Stress: HIGH ↓ (increasingly important)**Stabilizing:**

- Population of 523,000 (2009).⁵²
- Population density 18 persons per sq km⁵³
- Urban population 18 %

Destabilizing:

- ↓ Age structure: Median age is 19.7⁵⁴. 0-14 (39.5 %), 15-64 (57.1) %, 65+ (3.5 %).⁵⁵
- ↓ Increasing youth bulge with 37% of adult population in the 15-24 age cohort⁵⁶ (many of these youth are unemployed).
- ↓ Population growth: 27.69 births/1000; death rate: 3.77 deaths/1000.⁵⁷
- ↓ High unemployment (46.02%)⁵⁸
- ↓ Labour migration to Guadalcanal has occurred due to economic inequality, geographically unequal government and aid-related infrastructure expenditure, as well as falling log exports and low tree crop prices.⁵⁹
- ↓ Urbanization rate of 4.2 %⁶⁰

Assessment: High unemployment, youth bulge, rising population, and labour migration are likely to provoke increased tensions.

Economic Performance: EXTEREMLY HIGH ↓ (priority)**Stabilizing:**

- ↑ Moderate increases in foreign direct investment to the mining and telecommunications sectors⁶¹.
- ↑ Ministry of Finance and RAMSI are implementing a program to encourage business and entrepreneurship⁶².
- RAMSI assists with budgetary oversight and provides financial support to Solomon Islands. Total official development assistance provided for 2009-10 is \$246.3 million.⁶³ Approx. 58% will be spent on or by RAMSI.⁶⁴
- GDP growth per annum post conflict up to 10.3% in 2007 but dropped to 0.4% in 2009 (see below).⁶⁵ Asian Development Bank estimates that growth will be at 2.6% in 2010⁶⁶.
- Stable average exchange rate 2006 – 2008. Avg. of 7.67 SI\$/US\$⁶⁷.

Destabilizing:

- ↓ Economic growth decreased to 0.4% in 2009 due to global financial crisis and a low world demand for logs⁶⁸.
- ↓ Increasing inflation rates: 5.7% in 2005, 6% in 2007 and 14.3% in 2008⁶⁹
- Low gross national income per capita (PPP) of US\$2,610 in 2008⁷⁰ (169th in world⁷¹).
- High external debt: 48.4% of gross national income in 2007.⁷²
- ↓ In 2008, gross external reserves fell by 22.4% to SI\$716.1 million due to the current account deficit and exchange rate revaluation loss. (SI\$ 716.1 = 2.5 months of imports of goods and services to Solomon Islands).⁷³
- ↓ High reliance on imports of food and manufactured goods, resulting in a high cost of living.
- ↓ Persistent economic inequities: high income concentrated among the few individuals residing in urban areas.⁷⁴
- ↑ High dependence on agriculture; 75% of labour force concentrated in agricultural sector, most are subsistence farmers.⁷⁵
- ↓ Low economic diversification. Over dependence on logging causing rapid deforestation. Industry susceptible to price fluctuations. Natural stock will be completely depleted by 2013⁷⁶ at current unsustainable logging rates.⁷⁷ Logging volumes dropped by 30% in 2009⁷⁸.

Assessment: The economy is over-dependent on unsustainable resource extraction. Foreign debt and inflation are extremely high.

Human Development: MODERATE ↑**Stabilizing:**

- ↑ Education – 3.3% of GDP (135),⁷⁹ primary net enrolment 62 %⁸⁰; secondary school enrolment rate male 29% female 25%⁸¹ (improving)
- ↑ 70% of the population has sustainable access to improved drinking water sources.⁸²

Destabilizing:

- The HIV rate amongst 15-49 year olds was 0.8% in 2007.⁸³
- The UNDP ranks the Solomon Islands at 135th (score of 21.8) in its Human Poverty Index.⁸⁴
- ↑ Life expectancy at birth is only 64 years but is rising⁸⁵
- ↑ Fertility rate is high (3.9 %) but is on the decline⁸⁶
- ↑ Maternal mortality ratio 220 per 100,000 live births.⁸⁷
- ↑ Under 5 mortality is high (70/1000) but is on the decline.⁸⁸
- ↑ Nutrition: infants with low birthrate, 13%; underweight children below the age of five, 16%.
- ↑ Communication: telephones 8000; Mobile 14000; Internet users: 10 000⁸⁹
- ↑ Physicians 13 per 100 000⁹⁰
- ↑ Expenditure on health per capita \$107
- ↑ Population using improved drinking water 70 %: urban (90%), rural (65%)
- ↑ Population using improved sanitation facilities 32 %⁹¹
- ↓ Approximately 22.4 percent of children between 10 and 14 were working in 2002, and child prostitution is a growing problem.⁹²

Assessment: Populations are dispersed over islands thereby making education and other social services difficult.

Environmental Stress: EXTEREMLY HIGH ↓ (priority)

Stabilizing:

- ↑ UNICEF teams rapidly deployed for reconstruction and aid following January 2010 tsunami.⁹³
- Leaders of pacific island states including SI met at the Pacific Islands Forum in August 2009 to discuss climate change and call on the international community to reduce emissions and prevent rising sea levels that are detrimental to island states.⁹⁴
- 93 405 cubic meters of natural renewable water resources per person.⁹⁵

Destabilizing:

- ↓ Susceptible to tropical monsoons, typhoons, tsunamis, frequent earthquakes, tremors and volcanic activity.⁹⁶
- Arable land only makes up 0.62 % of the island, and permanent crops 2.04 %.⁹⁷
- Deforestation and soil erosion: loss of 1.68 % of forest per year.⁹⁸ Many surrounding coral reefs are dead or dying.⁹⁹
- April 2007, an undersea earthquake (8.1 on the Richter Scale) resulted in a Tsunami affecting 37,000 people, and causing 50 deaths.¹⁰⁰ Homes, buildings and health care facilities heavily damaged. 5,400 internally displaced persons.¹⁰¹
- February 2009, state of emergency declared due to flooding. Residents are evacuated from affected islands.¹⁰²
- January 2010 tsunami caused flooding, damage to homes, schools, and infrastructure.¹⁰³
- Limited road networks and air services. Maintenance of infrastructure has been deferred. Aid relief in the event of a natural disaster will be difficult.¹⁰⁴ Road ways 1,360 km (paved 33 km)¹⁰⁵

Assessment: Climate change may contribute to flooding and other natural disasters in small island developing states such as Solomon Islands. This issue is not being sufficiently addressed by much of the international community.

International Linkages: LOW RISK ↑

Stabilizing:

- ↑ Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Japan have diplomatic missions in the Solomon Islands. Solomon Islands also has diplomatic relations with China (PRC) and Taiwan.
- ↑ Troops and military from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga currently contribute to RAMSI. RAMSI also has 15 countries as advisors (all Pacific Island nations).
- ↑ Member of: UN, Commonwealth, Pacific Community, Pacific Islands Forum, WTO, Melanesian Spearhead Group, IMF, European Economic Community/African, Caribbean, Pacific Group¹⁰⁶.
- ↑ Cooperates under U.S.-Pacific Islands multilateral Tuna Fisheries Treaty¹⁰⁷
- ↑ Significant trade relationships with China (export partner 47.7%, 2008), Singapore, and Australia (import partners – 26.7% and 18.1% respectively, 2008).¹⁰⁸

Destabilizing:

- ↑ Western province residents are ethnically similar to Bougainville (Papua New Guinea) which has led to support for Bougainville secessionist movement and border incursions.¹⁰⁹
- ↓ Primary stakeholders in Solomon Island logging industry are timber companies of Malaysian, South Korean and Chinese origin¹¹⁰ (a major source of corruption and anti-Chinese sentiment leading to 2006 riots)
- Disputes with Australia in 2006 over the expulsion of Australian High Commissioner Patrick Cole for political interference. Further disputes in July 2007 over the appointment of Australian lawyer Julian Moti as Solomon Islands Attorney General despite allegations of child sex charges. He was later extradited.

Assessment: Increasing partnerships between Pacific Island nations and Solomon Islands has had a positive impact on both internal and external accountability.

Possible Scenarios for the Next 5 Years

Best Case Scenario:

Upcoming elections are free and fair resulting in the stabilization of the country. Stable coalitions within the government form and strong leadership emerges. Economic diversification and recovery materialize as Solomon Islands continues to create international linkages. A reduction in logging and re-growth of forestry encourage ecological balance. The Solomon Islands see a surge towards achieving the MDGs particularly in health and education. Women's movements also gain ground and more women are represented in the government. Internally, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is successful. There is also a reduction in natural disasters particularly those caused by climate change.

Worst Case Scenario:

Upcoming elections and pre-mature withdrawal of RAMSI trigger renewed conflict. Solomon Islands faces continued devastation as a result of natural disasters caused by climate change and depletion of forests caused by logging. Tsunamis, flooding, and destruction of greenery result in economic collapse and mass migration which further trigger conflict. Psychological trauma as a result of multiple successive environmental disasters also contribute to unrest. A significant and unemployed youth cohort combined with renewed ethnic tensions exacerbate conflict.

Most Likely Case:

Elections are likely to be moderately destabilizing but the presence of RAMSI will help to diffuse the situation. There will be a brief economic recovery following the global crisis. However, environmental deterioration as a result of climate change and logging causes later economic decline. International participation increases as Solomon Islands seeks integration in the global community. Social indicators improve particularly in areas of health and life expectancy. The MDGs especially those pertaining to education will not be met, however there will be an improvement in such statistics.

LEGEND	
RED	VERY HIGH RISK
ORANGE	HIGH RISK
YELLOW	MODERATE
GREEN	LOW RISK
↑	Indicator Improving
•	Indicator Stable
↓	Indicator Worsening

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