

# **Australian policy in Papua New Guinea: reconciling benign neglect and the new security agenda.**

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This paper seeks to identify the significance of Australia's recent 'reengagement' with PNG. It presents an overview of Australian relations with PNG and this reveals a sporadic pattern of interest in which the Australian Government has periodically sought to re-define the terms of engagement with PNG. In each of these instances, reengagement with PNG has been rationalised as an expression of Australian or regional security, and the depth of engagement has been limited to that which would achieve these objectives. This paper argues that the recent more interventionist policy of the Australian Government does not represent a significant deviation from this pattern of engagement. However, new conceptions of regional security infer a need for a deeper and longer term engagement with the social and economic issues confronting PNG. To this extent, the new interventionism raises a number of questions regarding the underlying objectives of Australian policy in PNG.

## **Introduction**

In June 2004 the Australian Government signed a Joint Agreement on Enhanced Cooperation with the Papua New Guinean Government in response to ongoing regional security concerns regarding civil disorder and failing governance capacity in Papua New Guinea (PNG). At a projected cost of \$800 million over five years the Enhanced Cooperation Program (ECP) was cast by the Australian Government as a

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significant reengagement with PNG.<sup>1</sup> The ECP was identified as a substantive policy shift from arms length aid based policy to an explicit intervention by Australian police and bureaucrats in PNG's public sector. Despite governmental declarations, however, the ECP has demonstrated questionable engagement with long term or underlying issues regarding poverty, conflict and state-society relations in PNG. This paper finds that the ECP is consistent with historical patterns of reluctant and sporadic Australian engagement with PNG. Moreover, it will be argued that Australia's limited engagement with PNG indicates the need for a closer examination of conceptions of Australian security and national interest with regard to PNG.

From nineteenth century fears regarding the imperial ambitions of European powers to current concerns regarding internal conflict and the viability of the PNG state, conceptions of Australian security have, albeit sporadically, prompted particular sets of objectives for Australian policy in PNG; sets of objectives that, in large part, are said to represent the Australian national interest.<sup>2</sup> Australian policy in PNG has reflected this pattern of engagement. While policies may have achieved objectives with regard to Australian security they have done so inconsistently and with limited engagement with the complexity of Papua New Guinean society.

Recent formulations of Australia's national interest with respect to PNG reflect the influence of a 'new' security agenda in which political and social instability in

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<sup>1</sup> AusAID, 'Australia's International Development Cooperation 2004-2005', Statement by the Honorable Alexander Downer MP Minister for Foreign Affairs, 11 May 2004, [http://www.aisaid.gov.au/budget/budget04/budget\\_2004\\_2005.html](http://www.aisaid.gov.au/budget/budget04/budget_2004_2005.html) (accessed May 10 2008).

<sup>2</sup> As Greg Fry has argued, historically the notion of Australian security has close association with regional security and in this context the concepts are 'inseparable'. Greg Fry, 'Australia's Regional Security Doctrine: Old Assumptions, New Challenges' in *Australia's Regional Security*, ed. Greg Fry (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 1.

Melanesia have been linked to a range of transnational threats to Australian security.<sup>3</sup> The new security agenda identifies national disunity and weak governance with civil disorder and growing poverty in PNG. In turn, civil disorder and poverty are linked with illegal migration, the spread of disease, transnational crime and even terrorist threats to Australian security.<sup>4</sup> In short, this rationale infers a closer relationship between Australian security and issues hitherto understood as pertaining to PNG's 'development'.

The declarations of the Australian Government and the intent of the ECP reflected an emphasis on law and order and liberal conceptions of 'good' governance as a means to development and stability in PNG. In response to these prescriptions a number of critiques have emerged that question not only the scope and scale of the intervention but the manner in which it was implemented. Ultimately, the ECP was a manifestly limited response to what was cast as potential state failure in PNG.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, critical perspectives have questioned the assumptions underlying governance reforms in complex political environments such as PNG where, it is claimed, western and indigenous political, social and economic traditions have merged in new and unfamiliar ways.<sup>6</sup> Insofar as alternate solutions to conflict and poverty in PNG are offered in these perspectives, they emphasise the need for a substantive or longer term engagement with the indigenous population of PNG.

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<sup>3</sup>John Henderson, 'Oceania and the New Security Agenda' in *Australian Security After 9/11*, ed. Derek McDougall and Peter Shearman (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), 176-177.

<sup>4</sup>Alexander Downer, 'Australian Responses to Global Challenges' (A speech to the French Institute of International Relations, February 1 2005).

<sup>5</sup>See Charles Hawksley, 'The Intervention you have when you're not having an intervention: Australia, PNG and the Enhanced Cooperation Program', *Social Alternatives* 24, 3 (2005):36.

<sup>6</sup>See for example, John Henderson, 'The future of democracy in Melanesia: What role for outside powers?' *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 44, 3 (2003).

Implicit in this critique is that Australian policy has, for what ever reason, sought short term solutions to issues in PNG that require a longer term perspective. In this way, it will be argued that Australia's recent engagement with PNG displays the same reticence to deeper engagement that has characterized Australian relations with its neighbour since the late nineteenth century.

The paper opens with an analysis of the character of Australian engagement with PNG during the colonial period. This section considers the notion of 'benign neglect' alongside a pattern of sporadic and ambivalent Australian interest in PNG. The following section considers Australian engagement with PNG in the post-colonial period and explores the sometimes tenuous links between foreign aid, development outcomes and Australian security. In the final section the significance of the ECP as 'reengagement' is considered alongside dominant critiques of the Program and this is followed by some concluding remarks.

### **Australian engagement in PNG: Benign neglect or reluctant engagement?**

#### *The Colonial era*

The phrase 'benign neglect' has long been used to characterize Australia's foreign policy in Papua New Guinea. Benign neglect conveys a sense of innocence as well as a more critical or accusatory meaning and in this way it carries with it a high degree of ambiguity. This characterization of Australian policy might first be attributed in a literal sense to the style of Australian colonial administration prior to independence in 1975. However, in a broader context it is claimed that benign neglect also

describes the patchy or inconsistent attention that Australia has devoted to PNG since Australia took control of British New Guinea in 1906.<sup>7</sup>

The notion that PNG is of fundamental strategic importance to Australia because of its geographical proximity has ‘remained axiomatic in the minds of Australia’s defence planners’.<sup>8</sup> However, from the time of Australia’s first colonial contact with the South Pacific region conceptions of Australian regional security have exhibited a shifting geographical focus.<sup>9</sup> For Greg Fry, benign neglect, as applied to Australian policy in the South Pacific, describes the way in which Australian security doctrines have given sporadic urgency to particular policies in the region.<sup>10</sup> Fry identifies key periods in which Australia has engaged with the proximate region as a response to perceived or actual threat. Prior to British colonization, PNG was recognized as a strategic ‘bulwark’ to German imperial expansion in 1885 when the colony of Queensland sought to annex Papuan coast. Likewise, in 1918 the South Pacific received attention in light of the perceived threat of Japanese imperialism. From 1919 until 1943 PNG and the South Pacific more generally were recognized with less urgency as a ‘zone of defence’ against a ‘usually ill-defined threat from the North.’<sup>11</sup>

Australia’s strategic commitment to PNG during this period requires some qualification. The early colonial administration in the territories of Papua and New

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<sup>7</sup> Greg Fry, “‘Constructive Commitment’ with the South Pacific: Monroe Doctrine or New ‘Partnership’?” in *Australia’s Regional Security*, ed. Greg Fry (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 125.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Parliament. Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *Australia’s Relations with Papua New Guinea: Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade*, (Senate Publishing and Printing Unit, 1991), 158.

<sup>9</sup> Greg Fry, ‘Australia’s Regional Security’, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Fry, ‘Constructive Commitment’, 125-126.

<sup>11</sup> Joint Committee, *Australia’s Relations*, 157.

Guinea has been described as one of ‘diffidence’ and ‘casual practicality’.<sup>12</sup> While strategic denial provides an account for Australian presence in PNG, as Denoon notes, ‘it was left to a handful of missionaries, planters and miners to embody Australia’s flickering interest in the Territory of Papua’.<sup>13</sup> From 1906 when Australia gained control of British New Guinea (and the territory was renamed Papua) until the 1960s when the independence of PNG began to take shape, the principles underlying Australia’s colonial style emphasized, to varying degrees, ‘an enlightened policy of protecting the native people from exploitation and their land from expropriation’, but also, an accompanying racism that cast indigenous culture as separate, inferior and at odds with western notions of development and civilization.<sup>14</sup> Narratives of this period in Australian history interpret Australian paternalism as a kind of passive leadership; the otherness of indigenous people underlay a clear rationale that if modernization or development were to occur in this region, it would occur very gradually.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Australia’s diffident commitment to its colony was accompanied by low levels of government funding during this period.

It is in this context that Australia’s commitment to PNG be better characterized as reluctant engagement than benign neglect; reluctant in the sense that from a great many perspectives pertaining to cultural and racial mindsets, PNG posed a real challenge for Australia. This is a dynamic that has a strong resonance with contemporary analysis of the Australia – PNG relationship. That is, to the extent that

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Denoon, *A Trial Separation: Australia and the Decolonization of Papua New Guinea* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2005), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Sean Dorney, *Papua New Guinea* (Sydney: Random House Australia, 1990), 30; Clive Moore, *New Guinea: Crossing Boundaries and History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 184.

<sup>15</sup> Moore, *Papua New Guinea*, 185.

the new paradigm of Australian security lays emphasis on development issues in PNG then the complexity of these issues must surely be foremost in the minds of policy makers.

The Japanese occupation of PNG in 1942 was, not surprisingly, accompanied by an intensification of Australian commitment to PNG and these events served to confirm the perception that PNG indeed was a strategic bulwark to Australia's north. In the aftermath of the war a broad commitment was made by the then Labor Government to promote development in PNG. From the point of view of Australian policy, and following the Japanese occupation of regions in both Papua and Australian New Guinea, in 1942 the separate administrations of the Territories were united in a single administrative unit. On 14 December 1946 the Australian Government signed an agreement with the UN committing the colonial territory to trusteeship.<sup>16</sup> Trusteeship was a formal legal mechanism that assured colonial powers adhere to a set of principles regarding the rights of non-self-governing territories. At face value Australian policy makers were committed to facilitating development in PNG towards either self-government or independence.<sup>17</sup> As Downs observes, however, in Australia the commitment of the Labor Party to trusteeship was also a mechanism by which Australia could maintain strategic control of PNG. Consistent with the UN Charter the Australian Government was permitted to place members of the Australian Army in PNG to facilitate 'international peace and security'.<sup>18</sup> In this

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<sup>16</sup> Ian Downs, *The Australian Trusteeship: Papua New Guinea 1945-75* (Canberra; Australian Government Publishing Service, 1980), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Downs, *The Australian Trusteeship*, 3; United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations and the International Court of Justice*, (New York: United Nations, 1990), Article 84. <http://www.icj-cij.org/documents/index> (accessed March 20 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Downs, *The Australian Trusteeship*, 3-4; UN, *Charter*, Article 84.

context, Australia's engagement with PNG carried some ambiguity. That is, Australian engagement with PNG appeared limited to that which would serve its own interests.

The commitment of the Australian Government to the principles of trusteeship appears tenuous and, in many respects, dependent on the commitment and abilities of particular Australian administrators and ministers during this period. Despite declarations and an increased financial commitment of the Australian Government to PNG, at an operational level post-war objectives proved difficult to achieve. Downs has documented the total disorganization surrounding the arrival of Colonel Murray, the first Administrator of civil government in this new era. For instance, Murray felt that 'the circumstances of his arrival were a prelude to bad communication and poor staff work which were to plague him throughout his term of office'.<sup>19</sup> Downs also notes the lack of planning by the Australian Government and indicative of this was the policy brief given to Murray that he should simply take his cues from public statements made in Canberra and the press.<sup>20</sup>

If benign neglect is said to characterize Australian policy in PNG in the post-War period it is also apparent that the Australian Government faced some genuine dilemmas that to a large degree were embedded in the principles of trusteeship. On one hand the Murray administration sought to promote economic independence while redressing the rights and interests of PNG people in the aftermath of the war, and on the other, there was pressure from external groups such as the United Nations (UN), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the

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<sup>19</sup> Downs, *The Australian Trusteeship*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 37-38 & 55.

commercial sector to utilize European or expatriate skills and knowledge to achieve these outcomes.<sup>21</sup> It is clear that the Labor Government of the day failed, at least in the view of its administrator, to provide sufficient planning and Ministerial leadership during this period, and with respect to the principles of trusteeship, it is said of Murray that he ‘became the conscience of the Australian Government’.<sup>22</sup>

The dominant principle shaping Australia’s post 1945 policy in the Territories of Papua and New Guinea, arguably until the late 1960s, was gradualism. Gradualism carried with it implicit understandings of development and referred to a process in which change would occur gradually in PNG, and in such a way that economic and political change would be instep with social development. It was this principle that informed the policies of Sir Paul Hasluck, Minister for Territories (1951 – 1963) and his successor, Charles Barnes (1963 - 1972). In the sense that Hasluck sought to ‘preserve social difference’ local integration into the public sector was inhibited. This more benign and paternal approach to colonial administration can be contrasted with that of European colonial powers who at this time were more actively attempting to build state institutions in ‘stateless societies’ in preparation for independence.<sup>23</sup>

In this respect Hasluck has been credited with adhering to the principles of trusteeship and making substantive advances in the health and welfare of Papua New Guinean people. However, his emphasis on administrative reform as opposed to political advancement and his broader commitment to gradualism soon became the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>23</sup> Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), *Strengthening Our Neighbour: Australia and the future of Papua New Guinea*. Barton, ACT: ASPI, 2004, 22.

target of opposition criticism and the end of bi-partisan support for these policies. This was significant, at least for Hasluck, because it indicated a shift from policy orientated around a long term perspective in PNG to that driven by political expediency.<sup>24</sup> Hasluck's commitment to an extended colonial period (and one that was characterized as one of 'benign paternalism') was at odds with the broader 'winds of change' in regard to self-determination in the post-colonial world that British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan famously referred to in 1958.<sup>25</sup>

There is perhaps some irony, then, that Hasluck's substantive or longer term engagement with PNG was cultivated when Australia's security concerns were focused in South and Southeast Asia.

### *Independence*

From the early 1960s the interplay of external factors and domestic circumstances in both PNG and Australia began to accelerate the push towards independence. In 1969 Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam visited the Gazelle Peninsula and declared his unambiguous support for independence.<sup>26</sup> During the 1960s Australian policy in PNG was subject to international influence in the wake of a broader post-WW2 movement to promote decolonization and the right to self-determination. External pressure and the ideological position of the decolonization movement was manifest not so much in the policies of the Barnes era but those of the Whitlam era when

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<sup>24</sup> Downs, *The Australian Trusteeship*, 233.

<sup>25</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1960, p.1. The phrase 'winds of change' was first used by the British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, in 1958, and he is credited by Downs for influencing Menzies' position in regard to Australia granting independence in PNG 'sooner rather than later'. See Downs, *The Australian Trusteeship*, 216.

<sup>26</sup> Dorney, *Papua New Guinea*, 47.

PNG's independence was linked with a broader re-appraisal of Australian regional identity. Foremost in this new self-definition was the idea that Australia should shift from 'being an outpost of European white settlers, a remnant of colonialism, to aspire to be a partner within the region...'<sup>27</sup>

In the two decades preceding PNG's independence Australian strategic and regional security policy was concerned with the 'forward defence' of Australia against the perceived threat of communism. To the extent that the source of this perceived threat was located in the newly independent Southeast Asian states, PNG was not accorded the same priority during this time.<sup>28</sup> There is some evidence that from 1966 the waning of the Chinese communist threat; the fall of Sukarno in Indonesia and Nixon's Guam doctrine (1968) contributed further to a broader understanding that the security prerogative was not central to the question of PNG's independence.<sup>29</sup> Despite this, however, following Indonesia's possession of West New Guinea (or Irian Barat/ Irian Jaya) in 1962, conflict between the Free Papua Movement and Indonesia's military in the border area increased the likely hood of conflict with Indonesia or at the very least signified a far more unstable security environment for Australia.

In this way, Australian policy and the accelerated push for PNG's independence between 1969 and September 1975 can be attributed to a far more pragmatic rationale. The presence of these movements presented Australian policy makers with

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<sup>27</sup> Hank Nelson, 'Liberation: the End of Australian Rule in Papua New Guinea' *The Journal of Pacific History*, 35, 3 (2000), 273.

<sup>28</sup> Fry, 'Australia's Regional Security', 4.

<sup>29</sup> DFAT, *Australia and Papua New Guinea, 1966-1969* ed. Stuart Doran (Barton, ACT: DFAT, 2006), xxv and liv.

a particular set of challenges. On one hand Australia sought to make independence conditional on PNG national unity, and on the other, secessionism (and potential for conflict with Indonesia in West Papua) presented the danger that Australia might be drawn into conflict in PNG.<sup>30</sup> In this context, Nelson observes that ultimately there was more anti-colonial rhetoric and pressure to bring about independence coming from the Australian government than there was from the Papua new Guineans themselves. Moreover, he argues that the gaining of independence in PNG might be more accurately characterized as ‘liberation [for the Australian Government] from what they believed were the real and perceived liabilities of colonialism’.<sup>31</sup>

Historical accounts of the decade preceding PNG’s independence in 1975 convey a strong sense that the process was ultimately rushed and, from many perspectives, premature. For some it is not that independence occurred too late but that its preparation started too late.<sup>32</sup> These accounts suggest that policy objectives were not always clearly annunciated and are, perhaps, better characterized as adhoc responses to a range of external and domestic influences. This would appear to be borne out by Hasluck’s own observations in 1975 that ‘Cabinet never had a thorough and well informed discussion of our policy and objectives in Papua New Guinea’.<sup>33</sup> And yet, the timing and process of PNG’s independence on 16 September 1975 and Australia’s ‘liberation’ from its colony demonstrated a high degree of deftness on the part of Australian policy makers.

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<sup>30</sup> Nelson, ‘Liberation’, 279.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>32</sup> Dorney, *Papua New Guinea*, 48.

<sup>33</sup> Hasluck quoted in Dorney, *Papua New Guinea*, 44.

### **Post-independence: ODA and regional security**

Despite declarations made by Whitlam emphasizing non-alignment and the abandonment of forward defence, by 1976 the focus of Australian regional security shifted back to the South Pacific and the strategic denial of the Soviets and Chinese (1976-79) and the Soviets (1984-87).<sup>34</sup> For Fry, the Soviet offer of economic assistance to Tonga in 1976 precipitated this policy shift; a shift which he characterizes as Australia's 'first major security policy towards the South Pacific since 1943-44'.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, insofar as this reorientation of regional security represented a reengagement with PNG, policies of strategic denial in the post-colonial period were achieved primarily by means of foreign aid or official development assistance (ODA).

The relationship between ODA and regional security has come to define the character of Australia's engagement with PNG since 1975. This characterization of Australian engagement in PNG alludes to a broader debate regarding the underlying objectives of ODA. Australian aid policy, like that of most donor states, has sought to reconcile humanitarian, economic, strategic, and more recently, environmental and human security objectives.<sup>36</sup> This multiplicity of aid objectives poses the potential for a trade-off between these objectives and this has been an ongoing issue of contention among development analysts and practitioners as well as being the subject of major governmental reviews.<sup>37</sup> This debate has most commonly been cast in terms

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<sup>34</sup> Fry, 'Australia's Regional Security', 5 See also Fry, 'Constructive Commitment', 126.

<sup>35</sup> Fry, 'Constructive Commitment', 127.

<sup>36</sup> Frank Jarrett, *The Evolution of Australia's Aid Program* (Canberra: The Australian National University, Australian Development Studies Network, 1994), 56 & 60.

<sup>37</sup> See for example, Satish Chand, 'Australian aid in the new millennium' *Development Bulletin*, 65, August 2004 and *Australia's Aid Program: Mixed Messages and Conflicting Agendas*, ed. Patrick Kilby (Monash University: Monash Asia Institute & Community Aid Abroad, 1996). For governmental reviews see

of the tension between the humanitarian or moral obligations and strategic objectives of donor nations.<sup>38</sup>

The foremost platform for bi-lateral aid partnerships between Australia and the Asia-Pacific was the Colombo Plan. At the time of its inception in 1950 an explicit link was made between foreign aid as a means to improving the living standards of countries in the Asia-Pacific region and inhibiting the spread of Communism. At this early stage, the links between ODA, poverty alleviation in Asia and Australian security were cast as unproblematic.<sup>39</sup>

There were numerous instances during the late 1970s and the 1980s where the flow of ODA corresponded to the perceived threat of Soviet or other presence in the South Pacific and, at first glance, these responses are consistent with broader Cold War imperatives.<sup>40</sup> As Thomas Davis has argued, however, by this time the effectiveness of ODA as a means to development in Asia was in doubt.<sup>41</sup> During the late 1960s there was a cognizance among senior Australian policy makers that the Colombo Plan was not achieving in Asia the economic and social outcomes the Marshall Plan had achieved in Europe. In this context the use of ODA as a means to

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Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program, *Report of the Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program March 1984*, (Canberra: AGPS 1984) and Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program, *One Clear Objective: Poverty Reduction through Sustainable Development. Report of Committee of Review*, (Canberra: Australian Agency for international Development, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> Jeremy Hobbs and David Goldsworthy, 'Introduction' in *Australia's Aid Program: Mixed Messages and Conflicting Agendas*, ed. Patrick Kilby (Monash University: Monash Asia Institute & Community Aid Abroad, 1996), xiv & xvii.

<sup>39</sup> See Percy Spender, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates Vol.204 (1950) p.3723. Quoted in Thomas Davis, 'Does Australia have an international development assistance policy?: National interest and foreign aid policy making' (paper presented at the Second Oceanic Conference on International Studies, University of Melbourne, July 5-7, 2006), 15.

<sup>40</sup> Derek McDougall, *Australian Foreign Relations: contemporary perspectives* (Melbourne: Addison Wesley Longman Australia Pty Ltd, 1998), 226. See also Fry, 'Australia's Regional Security', 6.

<sup>41</sup> Davis, 'Does Australia', 16.

addressing perceived security threats rested on the questionable capacity of Australian ODA to address development issues in the Asia-Pacific region.

Despite this ‘dissonance’, however, Davis has argued that Australian Governments have, perhaps with the exception of the Whitlam Government, sought to utilize ODA as a foreign policy tool.<sup>42</sup> In this way, he argues, the capacity for development assistance to address fundamental development issues such as poverty alleviation is subject to formulations of the national interest. From this perspective, the national interest, whether it be concerned with the threat of Communism, the liberalization of trade or, as is currently the case, with the transnational threat posed by failing states in the proximate region, is the dominant concern of policy makers.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Davis argues that ODA as an expression of engagement with PNG, for example, has tended to reflect short term foreign policy objectives. In this context, ODA policy in PNG has neglected alternate and perhaps more uncertain development strategies that take a longer term and more comprehensive approach to development in the region.

#### *Engagement and regional security: 1989*

In December 1989 Senator Gareth Evans released the Ministerial Statement, *Australia’s Regional Security*. The Statement was cast as a response to a new regional security environment in the post-Cold War period and it advocated a shift from ‘strategic denial’ in the South Pacific to ‘constructive commitment’.<sup>44</sup> In short,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 20-22.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>44</sup> DFAT, *Australia’s Regional Security*, Ministerial Statement by Senator the Hon. Gareth Evans QC, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, December 1989, (Canberra AGPS 1989), paragraph 177.

Evans was advocating a firmer engagement or 'partnership' with countries of the South Pacific, however, how this was interpreted and perceived in Australia and the region has been the subject of considerable debate. To what extent, then, did this declaration represent a new engagement with the South Pacific?

First and foremost the Statement was a response to fundamental changes in Australia's security environment in the late 1980s and in this context the links between Australian security and engagement with the South Pacific region are ever-present.

The first contextual change was that at this time there was a cognizance that Australian security concerns could no longer be linked to the fortunes of the West with regard to the Cold War. There appeared to be an opportunity to break from historical characterizations of Australia as 'agents of the West' (or adherents to an 'Australian Monroe doctrine'<sup>45</sup>) and to articulate a more independent policy in the region. From a broader perspective the ending of the Cold War not only erased the perceived threat of Soviet presence in the region but it also raised questions regarding the nature of US presence in the region and the ramifications of these changes for Australian security.

A second contextual change was in regard to Australia's increased capacity to be self-reliant in terms of military defence. This conceptual change in military defence strategy was announced in the 1986 Dibb Report and 1987 Defence White Paper.<sup>46</sup>

In short, the new thinking was that in light of both technological and capacity

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<sup>45</sup> Merze Tate, 'The Australasian Monroe Doctrine', *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXVI, 2, (1961).

<sup>46</sup> Commonwealth Report to the Minister for Defence by Mr. Paul Dibb, *Review of Australia's Defence Capabilities* (Canberra: AGPS, 1986). Commonwealth White Paper presented to Parliament by the Minister for Defence, the Hon. K.C. Beazley, *The Defence of Australia* (Canberra: AGPS, 1987).

development in Australia's defence forces and a reassessment of the type and likelihood of military threat to the Australian continent, Australian defence capacity would be less reliant on allies such as the US. In terms of Australia's regional security, this shift was understood to 'free up' Australian policy so that Australian interests could be more directly pursued. In the Statement, Evans frames this more assertive foreign policy as a means to ensuring regional stability and security; that is, it signaled a more direct engagement or 'constructive commitment' with the South Pacific. For Evans and Grant this was an 'intellectual breakthrough' that would allow a more independent foreign policy.<sup>47</sup>

A final contextual change to the Evans Statement was the increase in internal conflict in a number of South Pacific nations during the late 1980s. Evans' Statement and subsequent governmental enquiries cite conflict in Fiji and PNG, for example, as a 'new' threat to Australia's security.<sup>48</sup>

The Statement proposed a new multidimensional approach to policy making that would encompass a range of economic, diplomatic and military measures to pursue a partnership with countries in the South Pacific; a partnership that would transcend a long history of Australian hegemony in the region.<sup>49</sup> The Statement asserts the legitimacy of Australia seeking regional security in the South Pacific region but also is at pains to not be seen as a means to asserting regional (and perhaps neocolonial) dominance.<sup>50</sup> In this respect, constructive commitment was a very broad or

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<sup>47</sup> Gareth Evans and Bruce Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations: In the World of the 1990s*, 2nd ed., (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), 112.

<sup>48</sup> DFAT, 'Australia's Regional Security', paragraphs 40 and 41.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., paragraph 6. See also Senator Gareth Evans, 'Australia in the South Pacific', address to the Foreign Correspondents' Association, Sydney, September 23, 1988.

<sup>50</sup> DFAT, 'Australia's Regional Security', paragraph 178.

ambiguous doctrine and subject to a good deal of interpretation in terms of policy outcomes. As Peebles notes, the then Prime Minister Keating and the first Minister for Pacific Island Affairs, Gordon Bilney, were forthright and perhaps even 'pious' in their criticism of economic management of Pacific countries but on other occasions there was a reticence to interfere.<sup>51</sup> Assessments of Australian policies in PNG since 1975 and the degree to which they might be consistent with earlier characterizations of benign neglect are clouded by a potential sensitivity of the Australian Government to neo-colonialism. That is, there has been a demonstrable challenge for policy makers to find an approach that is neither neglectful nor interfering, and yet, there is also evidence that policy makers have justified neglect in just this way.<sup>52</sup>

Writing in 1991 Fry argued that while the Cold War imperative had largely been removed from Australian security calculations, the rhetoric of partnership with South Pacific countries was not clearly spelt out.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, he argued that the notion of partnership is made all the more doubtful when it is stated that Australia should exercise influence by 'defining issues in terms that suit our interests and in a way that leads, hopefully, to action in directions that profit Australia'.<sup>54</sup> In this context, the doctrine of constructive commitment did not represent an unambiguous break with the past.

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<sup>51</sup> Dave Peebles, *Pacific Regional Order* (Canberra: The Australian National University: ANU E press & Asia Pacific Press, 2005), 48.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Fry, 'Constructive Commitment', 128.

<sup>54</sup> DFAT, 'Australia's Regional Security', paragraph 160.

Beyond the declaratory nature of the Statement, however, Fry identifies a number of areas of potential policy departure. Significantly, in view of the new interventionism of 2003, these include 'a broadening of definition of 'regional security' to include internal stability in an island state' and an innovation in operational policy where military intervention in the South Pacific was now foreseeable in certain circumstances.<sup>55</sup>

Evans' declaration placed great emphasis on non-military strategies such as development assistance and diplomacy as a means to engage with the South Pacific. However, there is nothing to indicate that this multidimensional approach represents any deviation from past policies. Moreover, as Fry argues, while Evans' vision sought to focus on the 'political interests and agendas of Pacific Islanders for and of themselves, and the impact of foreign capital and development assistance on local political conflict' there was nothing to indicate how these 'new' strategies would achieve these ends. New conceptions of regional security identified development related issues as a key concern, however, the capacity of development and economic assistance to address the increasing social malaise in PNG, for example, was subject to some doubt.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the continuing advocacy of economic assistance as the primary means of engagement with PNG, albeit divorced from Cold War strategy, did not represent a significantly new policy.

Despite the proposed re-engagement with the South Pacific the problems facing PNG continued to worsen. During the 1990s issues of governance and maladministration continued to dog the PNG Government and these issues were

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<sup>55</sup> Fry, 'Constructive Commitment', 130.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 136.

intertwined with worsening economic indicators. This situation was further exacerbated by conflict in Bougainville and the closure of the Panguna mine in 1989. The foremost response of the Labor Governments, as outlined by Senator Evans, and then the Liberal Howard Government was to gradually impose conditions on Australian ODA. This shift towards conditionality is significant because it sent a clear message that the failures of development strategies in the past could be attributed to the domestic policies of aid recipient countries. That is, conditionality gave precedence to prevailing development paradigms or externally derived sets of solutions as a means to addressing the social and economic problems facing PNG.

From an operational viewpoint the increasing advocacy of economic rationalism as a means to development was indicative of a new policy emphasis and the conditionality of Australian ODA. Neoliberal strategies that emphasized state rationalization, privatization and deregulation and subsequent good governance paradigms that reinvigorated the role of state, albeit as a means to promoting private enterprise, were in most respects consistent with the broader ‘modernization’ paradigm of development.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, these new innovations reflected the influence of shifting development paradigms among donor countries internationally.<sup>58</sup>

From this perspective it might be argued that Australia was seeking greater engagement with PNG during this period. However, it is not entirely clear how to

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<sup>57</sup> Modernization Theory has its origins in nineteenth century Europe and projected the transition of traditional agrarian societies to urbanized and industrialized economies as a universal and inevitable process. See Walt Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960). See also Davis, ‘Does Australia’, 12.

<sup>58</sup> For an overview of the changing outlook of donor states in the North and the growing international consensus regarding the paradigm of good governance see Gordon Crawford, *Foreign Aid and Political Reform: A comparative Analysis of Democracy Assistance and Political Conditionality* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001).

frame this shifting focus towards PNG and the South Pacific more generally. On one hand, the fifteen years preceding the 2003-2004 interventions can be characterized as a time in which PNG did not feature in conceptions of Australian security in the same way that it did during the Cold War. However, Australia's interest in the unity of PNG was clearly demonstrated during the conflict in Bougainville. The Australian aid program has demonstrated, at the very least, a substantial financial commitment to PNG. Ultimately, however, while the aid program has undoubtedly brought benefit to Papua New Guinean society, it has failed to halt the worsening situation in that country.

Against this background, analysis of development strategies advocated by the Australian Government is particularly apposite. The new interventionism has adhered more explicitly to the very same principles that have animated Australia's aid program in PNG since independence. Moreover, this new engagement with PNG appears to have a direct relationship with shifting conceptions of regional security and, in this context, the ECP is indicative of Australia's sporadic engagement with PNG since 1906.

### **The ECP**

The ECP might first be viewed in relation to the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). By late 2003 the Solomon Island Mission was credited with achieving short term objectives with respect to civil disorder and it is likely that this served, in some way, as a precursor to the intervention in PNG. Speaking in

2004 Foreign Minister Alexander Downer identified three key areas or ‘constraints to good governance’ in PNG that the ECP would address. These were the failing institutions of law and order; maladministration and irresponsible fiscal governance and ‘an immigration system that protects border integrity’.<sup>59</sup>

The program was to be implemented by means of the placement of up to 230 Australian police and around 60 Australian public servants who would work alongside their PNG equivalents as well as in positions of policy management.<sup>60</sup> On the 13 May 2005, however, the PNG Supreme Court ruled that with respect to the sovereign immunity of Australian personnel the ECP agreement was inconsistent with the PNG constitution. In the aftermath of heated and complex negotiations around forty Australian civil servants remained in PNG.<sup>61</sup> This development represented a significant set back for Australian policy makers and gave an indication that the Australian Government was not unlimited in its capacity to assert its will. Moreover, the adversarial nature of these negotiations also reflected the conditionality of Australian ODA that was attached to the ECP from its inception.

In fact, the advocacy of governance reforms was not without precedent in Australia’s ODA programs. As has been outlined, during the 1990s Australian ODA policy reflected something of a consensus regarding the weakness of governance in the South Pacific region. In 2002 then Foreign Minister Alexander Downer made this emphasis clear; ‘governance is now the largest focus of our aid and underpins all of our aid investments. This will be reinforced by greater use of incentive-based

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<sup>59</sup> AusAID, *Australia’s International Development Cooperation 2004-05*, Chapter 2.

<sup>60</sup> See Charles Hawksley, ‘The Intervention you have when you’re not having an intervention: Australia, PNG and the Enhanced Cooperation Program’ *Social Alternatives* 24, 3, (2005): 36.

approaches to reward good performance and encourage reform'.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless the shift in policy in 2003 to 'cooperative intervention' did represent a more explicit assertion of the Australian reform agenda.

#### *Accounts for the New Interventionism*

Accounts for the RAMSI policy reversal and the more interventionist stance in PNG are numerous. Taken at face value, governmental declarations at the time of these interventions asserted, sometimes ambiguously, the links between underdevelopment, internal conflict, humanitarian concerns and regional security.<sup>63</sup> From the late 1990s declarations of Downer and others began to make explicit links between underdevelopment in the proximate region and a range of transnational threats to Australian security. In 1999, for example, Downer noted that 'in a region under stress economically, we may see an increase in the prominence of transnational issues, such as illegal migration, piracy, illegal fishing and drug smuggling, and a greater risk that these will cause friction between neighbors'.<sup>64</sup>

By 2003-2004 the conceptual linkage between development and security was made with reference to failed or failing states.<sup>65</sup> At the time of the policy shift,

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<sup>61</sup> AusAID, *Australia's Overseas Aid Program 2005-06*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. URL: <http://www.budget.gov.au/2005-06/ministerial/html/ausaid.htm>. (accessed May 1 2008).

<sup>62</sup> AusAID, media release for the 11<sup>th</sup> Statement to Parliament on Australia Ministerial Statement, *Australian Aid: Investing in Growth, Stability and Prosperity*, 24 September 2002, [http://www.ausaid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Media&ID+8027\\_6837\\_5995\\_1298\\_554](http://www.ausaid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Media&ID+8027_6837_5995_1298_554) (accessed March 25 2008).

<sup>63</sup> AusAID, *Pacific Regional Aid Strategy 2004-2009*, (Canberra: AusAID, 2004), 4, [http://ausaid.gov.au/publications/PDF?Pacific\\_regional\\_strategy.pdf](http://ausaid.gov.au/publications/PDF?Pacific_regional_strategy.pdf) (accessed March 25 2008).

<sup>64</sup> Alexander Downer, *Address to the Royal Institute for International Affairs*, Chatham House, London, England, 1 February 1999. See also AusAID, *Australian Aid*, 9.

<sup>65</sup> For an overview of the concept of state failure see I. William Zartman, 'Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse' in *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. I. William Zartman, (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc, 1995). See also Sebastian Von Einsiedel, 'Policy Responses to State failure' in *Making States Work: State failure and the Crisis of*

declaratory statements of the Australian government securitized the discourse of state failure; that is, state failure in the proximate region was identified as a threat to Australia's security.<sup>66</sup> This position was articulated most carefully in highly influential reports prepared by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in 2003 and 2004.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, state failure or state fragility was linked to the failure of Australian ODA and this gave rise to 'an unlikely convergence between critics [of Australian ODA] on both the left and right of the political spectrum'.<sup>68</sup> This broad critique of Australian ODA undoubtedly influenced Government policy. However, the new interventionism and this new synergy linking the 'modalities' of security and development requires more explanation.<sup>69</sup>

The case that failed states in Australia's proximate region are potential staging posts for terrorist attacks in the region is open to question.<sup>70</sup> Despite this tenuous link, however, the post 9/11 environment and terrorism more broadly has had an enormous impact on public perceptions of threat in Australia and this needs to be reconciled with the various explanations for this policy shift.

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*Governance*, ed. S. Chesterman, M. Ignatieff & R. Thakur (New York: United Nations University Press, 2005). For an analysis of the concept in the Australian context see Michael O'Keefe, 'Australian Intervention in its Neighbourhood: Sheriff and Humanitarian?' in *Righteous Violence: The Ethics and Politics of Military Intervention*, ed. Tony Coady & Michael O'Keefe (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), 89-95.

<sup>66</sup> Lambach, Daniel, 'Security, Development and the Australian Security Discourse about Failed States' *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 41, 3, (2006): 407-418.

<sup>67</sup> Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), *Strengthening Our Neighbor: Australia and the future of Papua New Guinea*, (ACT: ASPI Ltd, 2004), 14.

<sup>68</sup> Sinclair Dinnen, 'Aid effectiveness and Australia's new interventionism in the Southwest Pacific', *Development Bulletin* 65 (2004): 76.

<sup>69</sup> Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Security and Development*, London: Zed Books, 2001. Mark Duffield has made a global-level case for the linking of security and development paradigms. In his 2001 monograph he shows how Northern donor states are seeking stability in the Global South by means of renewed and more transformative development strategies.

<sup>70</sup> See ASPI, *Strengthening our Neighbor*, 16.

One reading of the new interventionism is that the ‘war on terror’ and Australia’s close alliance with the Bush administration under Howard’s leadership was a key explanatory factor.<sup>71</sup> From this perspective the new interventionism was a contemporary manifestation of traditional or historical Australian security strategies that have placed a premium on Australia’s allegiance with ‘great and powerful friends’. In this way Australia’s participation in the ‘coalition of the willing’ in Iraq was linked with the new willingness of the Australian Government to intervene in the proximate region. With respect to the South Pacific Australia was viewed as fulfilling a role now famously characterized as ‘deputy sheriff’ for the US.

Other observers acknowledge Australia’s so-called ‘deputy sheriff’ role in the proximate region but view the 12 October 2002 bombings in Bali as the moment at which Australian policy makers could rationalize a more explicit engagement with the Melanesian region.<sup>72</sup> From this perspective Bali was ‘Oceania’s 9/11’ and in this context the new interventionism reflected more immediate security concerns with regard to Australia’s proximate region. This reading of RAMSI and the ECP finds some common ground with those who view the new interventionism as a reflection of Australia’s capacity and willingness to define and pursue its security interests in the proximate region independent of ‘traditional security strategies’. Michael O’Keefe has argued that the US alliance provides only a partial explanation for the new interventionism.<sup>73</sup> From this perspective the new interventionism was a case of

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<sup>71</sup> Sinclair Dinnen, ‘Aid effectiveness’, 77.

<sup>72</sup> Henderson, ‘Oceania and the New Security Agenda’, 177.

<sup>73</sup> Michael O’Keefe, ‘Australia and Fragile States in the Pacific’ in *Trading on Alliance Security: Australia in World Affairs 2001-2005*, ed. James Cotton and John Ravenhill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 147-148.

Australia responding independently to what it perceived as a range of transnational threats, presumably including terrorism, to its own security.

The rhetorical links between failed states and transnational threats to Australian security must also be viewed in context of domestic Australian politics. The interventionism was legitimized by the Australian Government in both humanitarian and strategic terms. As has been discussed, the relationship between these objectives has been an ever-present theme in debates with regard to Australia's ODA program. However, the synergy between these objectives has perhaps never been so clearly expressed by the Australian Government as it was in 2003-2004. Indeed this new and ambiguous rhetoric is consistent with the underlying rationale that underdevelopment in Melanesia is a perceived threat to Australian (regional) security. However, in different ways the rhetoric of humanitarian intervention and regional security enhanced the electoral prospects of the incumbent Liberal Government in the 2004 Federal elections. As has been argued elsewhere it is difficult to accept this rhetoric at face value – especially given the demonstrable domestic political exploitation of Asylum seekers in Australia during this period.<sup>74</sup> In this context, the integrity of governmental declarations is compromised and assessments of the ECP are all the more difficult.<sup>75</sup>

The new interventionism, then, can be attributed to domestic, regional and international influences and circumstances. From a broad perspective, the events of 9/11 and Bali in 2002 prompted a particular awareness of security related issues in

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<sup>74</sup> Allan Patience, 'The ECP and Australia's Middle Power Ambitions' (Discussion Paper, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2005/4), 2-3.

<sup>75</sup> See O'Keefe, 'Australian Intervention', 76-77.

the international environment. In the Australian proximate region while the rhetoric of terrorism would not stand the test of objective analysis, transnational issues in regard to migration, crime and disease serve to rationalize a new security paradigm. In this context, internal instability in PNG and the South Pacific region was cast as a threat to Australian security and these security concerns sat alongside international expectations of Australian obligations in the region. A final and perhaps even more pervasive influence was that of domestic politics.

There is no doubting that during the period 2003-2004 there was an intensification of engagement with PNG and Melanesia more broadly. However, the above accounts make it abundantly clear that a single and overriding rationale for the new interventionism cannot be identified. It is perhaps indicative of historical patterns of Australian engagement with PNG that such ambiguity underlies this more recent re-engagement with PNG.

A proper assessment of Australia's engagement with PNG must account for this range of influences alongside broader questions regarding the commitment and capacity of the Australian Government to address the complexity of development issues in PNG. Insofar as Australia's (in)security might be linked to underdevelopment in PNG, however, critiques of the ECP have questioned the commitment of the Australian Government to precisely these goals.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Dinnen, 'Aid effectiveness', 79.

### *Critiques of the ECP and governance reforms in PNG*

Concerns with the ECP can be broadly divided into two areas. The first is in regard to the style or manner in which the program has been presented to PNG and the second is more concerned with the substance of the Program. For some, the near fatal legal obstacles to the ECP and huge financial and diplomatic cost of withdrawing Australian personnel from PNG were indicative of a broader naivety and lack of planning within Australia's aid bureaucracy. John Fowke has characterized the ECP as a 'monumental failure...in primary research and planning by Foreign Affairs'; perhaps overstating the Program's weaknesses, however, the criticism has a strong resonance with observations made by Murray and Hasluck fifty years prior.<sup>77</sup> From another perspective the brinkmanship that characterized these negotiations could be attributed to the diplomatic approach of the Australian Government.

For a number of observers the heavy handed manner in which the ECP was pursued had a negative impact on negotiations between the Australian and PNG Governments.<sup>78</sup> In this respect, the conditionality or 'big stick' originally attached to PNG's acceptance of the ECP may have prompted an adversarial dynamic in relation to legal negotiations. Furthermore, the diplomatic context for these negotiations was influenced by the heavy emphasis on Australian security in declarations made by the Australian Government. While this emphasis played well to the domestic constituency in Australia this rhetoric was greeted with suspicion in PNG.<sup>79</sup> At the

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<sup>77</sup> John Fowke, 'Getting it Wrong in Papua New Guinea' *Quadrant Magazine* L, 12 (2006); Downs, *The Australian Trusteeship*, 19, 37-38 & 55.

<sup>78</sup> Hawksley, 'The Intervention', 36-37.

<sup>79</sup> Dinnen, 'Aid effectiveness', 79.

very least, these declarations made it abundantly clear that law and order in PNG was an issue for Australia – they also inferred Australia’s response to this perceived threat would reflect this emphasis.

In terms of substance the ECP did in fact reflect these concerns. Putting aside the 260 police who were to be deployed in PNG prior to the 2005 legal challenge, around a half of the remaining Australian bureaucrats were assigned to law and justice and border control agencies.<sup>80</sup> Presumably, the principle underlying this strategy was that PNG’s law and order problems could be addressed by strengthening the institutions of law and justice. However, as Dinnen has argued, while these institutions need to be strengthened, ‘many law and order problems are simply not susceptible to law and order solutions alone’.<sup>81</sup>

It is this issue of addressing underlying or formative development issues in PNG that is at the nub of debates regarding the ECP and governance reforms in Melanesia more generally. The governance reforms prescribed by the Australian Government were leveled at a number of areas of PNG’s public sector besides that of justice and border control; for example, in regard to public sector management and finance. The principles underlying these reforms derived from the greater concept of good governance.

In this context, good governance and new forms of political conditionality represented a nuanced shift away from the dominant neoliberal development prescriptions of the 1980s. In context of increasing evidence that Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were failing to facilitate economic growth and in many

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<sup>80</sup> Cited in Hawksley, ‘The Intervention’, 36.

cases actually increasing levels of poverty, in the late 1980s the World Bank identified the weakness of domestic political institutions to implement these programs as the source of this failure.<sup>82</sup> This new perspective reinvigorated the role of the state in the development process, albeit with some ambiguity. Gordon Crawford argues that this shift in advocacy is best characterized as one from 'minimal' state to 'effective' state where '...the state should perform its role effectively, however defined, yet with a particular emphasis on economic management functions.'<sup>83</sup> The concept of good governance is framed in neutral or apolitical terms. However, it conveys notions of economic efficiency, political accountability, legitimacy and authority and ultimately these principles overlap with those of liberal democracy. While the concept is contested it articulates a set of principles that can be firmly posited in the Western liberal democratic tradition.<sup>84</sup>

In operational terms these principles are manifest in the top down or statecentric reforms to the Papua New Guinean public sector. These reforms assume the existence of state-society relations in PNG as they exist in western democracies such as Australia. A broad and generic criticism of governance reforms in Melanesia,

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<sup>81</sup> Dinnen, 'Aid effectiveness', 79.

<sup>82</sup> World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Development* (Washington DC: World Bank, 1989).

<sup>83</sup> Crawford, *Foreign Aid*, 27.

<sup>84</sup> For an overview of the concept of good governance see Thomas G. Weiss, 'Governance, good governance and global governance: conceptual and actual challenges', *Third World Quarterly* 21, 5, (2000). For a useful review of the incorporation of good governance into the declarations of the Australian Government see Susan Cirillo, 'Australia's Governance Aid: Evaluating Evolving Norms and Objectives', (Discussion Papers: Policy and Governance, Asia Pacific School of Policy and Government, Australian National University, 2006). Available at [http://www.apseg.anu.au/degrees/discussion\\_papers/PDP06-01.pdf](http://www.apseg.anu.au/degrees/discussion_papers/PDP06-01.pdf) (accessed 27/9/06).

then, is that these reforms do not account for the particularity of state-society relationships in post-colonial states such as PNG and the Solomon Islands.<sup>85</sup>

The ethnic and linguistic diversity of PNG (and the Solomon Islands) is oft quoted in debates regarding governance reforms in Melanesia and it is this diversity that gave rise to traditional kinship divisions or *wantoks*. Localism remains dominant in contemporary PNG. To this extent the adoption of a unitary Westminster political and bureaucratic system of government in PNG, perhaps ‘more by default than by intent’, remains a contentious issue. In this context the security narrative underlying state failure in Australia’s proximate region is questionable because it assumes the existence of a ‘state’, understood in liberal democratic terms, in the first place. However, to the extent that conflict and social dislocation in PNG are attributed to the mismatch of indigenous and liberal democratic political systems then a number of important questions are raised.

For the Australian Government the failure of governance in Melanesia is identified in high levels of endemic corruption in the public sector.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, it is often acknowledged that this failure of governance is linked to the ‘ill-fitting overlay of state institutions with traditional structure’; that is, the weakness of the system is linked to the mismatch between traditional and imposed institutions of governance.<sup>87</sup> Consistent with this rationale is the perception that indigenous practices stand as an obstacle to a strong state as conceived in the liberal democratic

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<sup>85</sup> Dinnen, ‘Aid effectiveness’, 77.

<sup>86</sup> AusAID, *Pacific Regional Aid Strategy: 2004-2009* (Canberra: AusAID 2004), 15  
[URL:<http://www.auseid.gov.au/publications/PDF/pacific\\_regional\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.auseid.gov.au/publications/PDF/pacific_regional_strategy.pdf). (accessed March 29 2008).

<sup>87</sup> Elsin Wainright, ‘Responding to state failure – the case of Australia and the Solomon Islands’ *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 57, 3 (2003): 488.

tradition. Against this background there is a strong rationale for liberal intervention as manifest in the ECP and RAMSI.

However, as Jon Fraenkel has argued in relation to state building in the Solomon Islands, to frame this debate in terms of the juxtaposition of traditional and liberal political forms is to ignore a long history of social and political integration.<sup>88</sup> That is, he argues that just as introduced institutions were indigenized in the Solomon Islands, indigenous customs adapted in different ways to colonial policy during the nineteenth and twentieth century.<sup>89</sup> In short, he argues that to attribute social, economic and political decay in Melanesia to the failure of liberal political institutions to graft on to traditional institutions and structures is to over-simplify the situation. Solutions to the social and economic problems facing PNG and the Solomon Islands, then, require a cognizance of this complexity.

It is in this context that a number of policy analysts are advocating alternative approaches to state building in PNG that integrate the democratic institutions that have survived in PNG with a localized decentralized system of government that is cognizant of local identity and obligations.<sup>90</sup> The point to be made here is that, to date, the Australian Government's engagement with PNG has not demonstrated willingness to embrace these alternate and perhaps more uncertain strategies.

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<sup>88</sup> Jon Fraenkel, *The Manipulation of Custom: From Uprising to Intervention in the Solomon Islands* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>90</sup> See for example, Ben Scott, 'Re-imagining PNG, Culture, Democracy and Australia's Role' (Lowy Institute Paper 09, Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2005); Fowke, 'Getting it Wrong'; Dinnen, 'Aid Effectiveness', 77.

Arguably, it is these strategies that will have some positive impact on the social and economic problems facing PNG.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to place the ECP in context of historical patterns of Australian engagement with PNG. It has argued that the new interventionism as manifest by the ECP is consistent with sporadic and security driven interest in PNG. While the ECP was promoted as a significant reengagement with PNG, a cursory overview of Australian relations with PNG over the last century reveals a number of occasions where the Australian Government sought to re-define the terms of Australian engagement with PNG. In each of these cases conceptions of Australian security have acted as conduits for 'reengagement'.

Following the Second World War the Australian Government advocated a greater commitment to development in PNG following a realization of its security worth during the war. This commitment waned during the 50s and 60s as conceptions of regional security focused elsewhere. Paradoxically, Australia's withdrawal from PNG in 1975 was also an expression of Whitlam's re-definition of Australia's place in the world and a renewed commitment to the proximate region as equal partner. In the late 1970s Australia's attention to PNG was dictated by new Cold War strategic concerns. In 1989 Senator Evans' renewed engagement with the proximate region was a response to shifting conceptions of regional security at the end of the Cold War.

In 2004 the ECP was also cast as a response to regional security concerns. This time, however, failing states in Australia's proximate region were identified as a potential source of transnational threats to regional security and stability. The paradigm of state failure has elicited an interventionist response from donor states on a global level and Australia's response in PNG has been no exception. In this context, the ECP has been a more explicit engagement with PNG, however, analysis of the style and substance of these policies has revealed the limitations of this engagement.

In the past, the extent of Australia's engagement with PNG has secured Australia's security interests by means of physical or military presence, development assistance or both. What is clear, however, is that Australia's strategic goals have been achieved in the absence of meaningful or substantive engagement with the issues facing a country in economic and social transition. To the extent that new conceptions of Australian security place a premium on peaceful development in PNG, the ECP, like the bulk of engagement in the past, has not engaged with the complexity of these issues.

If, as Davis has suggested, Australian ODA and programs such as the ECP are limited with respect to formulations of the national interest then one of two conclusions might be reached. Either Australian policy in PNG is manifestly failing to serve the national interest, or formulations of the national interest in PNG reflect policy objectives besides those suggested by the new security agenda. In either case, these conclusions suggest the need for further analysis of the already contested concept of national interest in regards to Australian policy in PNG.

