Reputation and Responsibility in Australia's 2003 Intervention in Solomon Islands

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Abstract

This article reinterprets Australia's motives for its 2003 intervention in Solomon Islands. The central argument is that considerations of Australia's international reputation have not been afforded sufficient importance in explaining the Howard government's decision to intervene. A primary concern for the Howard government was to bolster Australia's reputation in the "war on terror" vis-à-vis the United States and the international community more broadly by being seen to maintain order in its regional sphere of responsibility. The article establishes the historical basis for Canberra's claims to a special responsibility for the Southwest Pacific region. It then demonstrates the close connection between Australia's responsibility for order in its region and the reputational norms that evolved during the early years of the war on terror. These claims are substantiated through an analysis of the Solomon Islands crisis from June 2000 until RAMSI was deployed in July 2003.

The Solomon Islands are a double chain of Melanesian islands stretching in a 1400 kilometre south-eastern arc from Papua New Guinea. The Australia-led intervention in July 2003 known as the Regional Assistance Mission Solomon Islands (RAMSI) involved military, police and bureaucratic personnel under the multilateral auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). The intervention was a response to the ethno-political, socio-economic and governance crisis that developed predominantly on the island of Guadalcanal between 1998 and 2003. The ostensible motives for Canberra's intervention were to prevent a state failure on Australia's "doorstep" and associated transnational problems of people smuggling, drug trafficking, money laundering and potentially, terrorism. Stated along with these motives, however, were repeated assertions that Australia's international "standing" would be damaged if it failed to keep order in the Southwest Pacific; or in the language of Prime Minister at the time, John Howard, in "our patch".

This article reconsiders Australia's motives for the 2003 intervention. My central argument is that the motive of Australia's international reputation has not been

afforded sufficient importance in explaining the Howard government's decision to intervene. A primary concern for the Howard government was to bolster Australia's international reputation in the "war on terror" by being seen to keep order and manage transnational security problems in its regional sphere of responsibility. I do not claim that reputation was the sole motive for the intervention, but that it was a central consideration within a mix of factors, and taken by the Howard government to some degree as an end in itself.

Motives are considered here to be context-specific reasons or justifications for action rather than efficient causes (Weber 1947: 98-9). An examination of the setting in which decision-making takes place and an understanding of the shared meanings operating within this context can allow the observer to make reasonable inferences about the veracity of motives, whether stated or implicit. International "order" is understood here in English School terms as a "pattern" or set of principles that sets normative standards for state behaviour (see Buzan 2004: 46-51). The reputation of satisfied, status quo powers like Australia is heavily invested in the prevailing international order, which reflects their values and serves their interests.

Reputation is a relational concept in that it is a perception held by others (Mercer 1996: 27-8). Reputation refers not only to rationalist notions of "credibility", considered as a state's reputation for resolve in keeping commitments. It is also normative in that a state may choose to align its behaviours with established reputational norms in the international community (Markey 2002). This may include high cost activities such as intervening in failed or "rogue" states to restore order or uphold values such as non-proliferation, good governance or the "responsibility to protect". Capable states attract moral opprobrium when they fail to do these things as in the case of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. **In a less elevated sense, reputation**

refers to “being a good international citizen” by participating constructively in international organisations and contributing to a more secure and prosperous world.

This concern for order and reputation resonates with both the “middle power” and “great and powerful friend” traditions in Australian diplomacy (see Wesley and Warren 2000). Australia’s managerial and governance-promoting role in the South Pacific region is consistent with Australia’s self-identification as an important member of the liberal-democratic core of the international community and Canberra’s understanding of its US alliance responsibilities. For Australia, promoting liberal governance norms in its **regional** sphere of responsibility was a crucial reputational consideration as the evidence presented below attests. This imperative was acutely heightened in the transnational threat environment that developed after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

In developing this argument, the paper proceeds through four sections. The first part mounts a literature review to ascertain the main positions in the scholarship regarding Canberra’s reasons for the intervention. My conclusion from this review is that while Australia’s perceived responsibility to arrest state failure and instability in the Southwest Pacific region is emphasised by some authors, the link to reputation is not adequately made. Based on historical evidence, the second part of the paper argues that the Howard government was justified in claiming a special managerial responsibility for the Southwest Pacific region on behalf of its traditional Western allies. The third part of the paper highlights the close connection between Australia’s historical responsibility for order in its region and the reputational norms of the international community during the war on terror. The fourth section substantiates these claims through an analysis of the Howard government’s statements during the

Solomon Islands' crisis from the coup in Honiara in June 2000 until RAMSI was deployed in July 2003.

The Literature on RAMSI

Approaching a decade after its deployment RAMSI has generated a burgeoning literature. Much of it is concerned primarily with the state-building process and its problems, and does not directly engage with the themes discussed here (e.g. Morgan and McLeod 2006; Wainwright 2006; Moore 2007b; Dinnen 2008a; Dinnen and Firth 2008). A number of scholars analyse the Solomon Islands' crisis, intervention and state-building "package" predominantly from the local perspective, rather than from Australia's (see Moore 2004, 2007a, 2008a, 2008b; Fraenkel 2004; Nanau 2008; Dinnen 2008b; Dinnen and Firth 2008).

An important position in the literature is centred on the work of Shahar Hameiri. Using RAMSI as a key example, Hameiri has developed a theory of neo-liberal "state transformation" culminating with the 2010 book, *Regulating Statehood*. Hameiri's argument is that state-building in "fragile" states with its focus on "capacity" is not a neutral, technocratic process. Rather, it 'constitutes a political and ideological mechanism' for 'state transnationalisation' in line with dominant neo-liberal models of governance and development (Hameiri 2009: 57-8). Within this framework, Hameiri (2010: 157) argues that 'RAMSI should be understood and evaluated as a multilevel regime of state transformation, which aims to fundamentally circumscribe political choices for Solomon Islanders by opening up transnational-regional spaces of governance within the state'. Australia's interests have presumably been bound up in this neo-liberal project of governance and state transformation since **at least the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis**. So while valuable in illuminating the ideological context of Australia's recently intensified South Pacific engagement,

Hameiri's work sheds little light on the motives for why the Howard government intervened in Solomon Islands when it did and why.

Along similar lines, Clapton (2009: 422) posits a post-Cold War move from a pluralist to hierarchical international society based on relative capacities for liberal-democratic governance. For Australia, particularly after the 2002 Bali bombings, this resulted in heightened attention to the possibility of state failures in its region, which was 'reflected in the decision to intervene in the Solomon Islands in 2003'. McKibbin (2009) and Lambach (2006) draw on Duffield's (2001) "securitisation of development" thesis to explain Australia's intervention. Allen and Dinnen (2010: 302) ultimately account for RAMSI as a case of the 'local "North" seeking to 'impose a liberal peace over a deviant and unruly neighbour' in the South. **But whether focused on risk management, capacity-building, the security-development nexus or the liberal peace, these explanations all fail to** recognise that Australia's reputation among its peers is deeply implicated in promoting these norms of international order in its sphere of responsibility.

Most analyses of the Howard government's direct motives for RAMSI tend to posit an unprioritised mix of factors (e.g. Dinnen 2004; McDougall 2004; Moore 2005; Fullilove 2006). These include the global security climate of transnational threats prevailing after 9/11 and the Bali bombings; the humanitarian imperative; the risk of instability spreading throughout the Melanesian "arc"; the ineffectiveness of Australia's previous aid policies; pressure from civil society, media, think-tanks and academics; and as a justification for the Howard government to avoid committing more troops to Iraq. Australia's international reputation is implicated in a number of these factors but none of these authors develop this line of enquiry.

In addition, Wainwright (2003; 2004) emphasises the strategic dimension for Australia. Vulnerable “failing” states in the region were a potential power vacuum that could be filled by foreign interests such as China and Taiwan. This is a recent variation of the longstanding Australian aspiration for a South Pacific “Monroe Doctrine”, which stretches back to the colonial era and was termed “strategic denial” during the Cold War (Herr 1984: 185). Most important for the argument here, Wainwright also makes the point, although it is **not developed, that** Australia’s ‘diplomatic standing’ was at stake. Canberra had an international responsibility to do something about such a high level of political and civil disorder on its ‘doorstep’ (Wainwright 2004: 124-6). I argue below that the Howard government’s perceptions of Australia’s reputation became closely linked during the war on terror to Canberra’s responsibility to keep order in its region on behalf of its “coalition of the willing” allies.

A final position in the literature argues that Australia’s official motives for the intervention – to prevent transnational threats from Solomon Islands by restoring law and order and rebuilding the machinery of government – were largely disingenuous. In this view RAMSI was driven almost exclusively by considerations external to Solomon Islands. Dobell (2008: 58) argues that RAMSI was a result of the intersection between ‘a new set of fears about terrorism and the threat that could emerge from failed states’ and Australian policy-makers’ cumulative experiences in dealing with “Melanesia-style” issues. Kabutaulaka (2005: 296) notes that failed state discourses at the global level of the war on terror were a comfortable fit with the typically negative images held by the Australian policy community, journalists, conservative think tanks and some academics about a corrupt and incompetent “arc of instability” in Melanesia (e.g. Reilly 2000; 2004; Reilly and Wainwright 2005).

Building on these observations, Fry and Kabutaulaka (2008: 24) make two further important points that I seek to develop in this article by making the link to Australia's reputation as a central motive for the Solomon Islands' intervention. They first argue that the war on terror had 'a significant influence' in altering 'international norms concerning state-building intervention'. The interventionist norms that coalesced in the 1990s around democratisation and humanitarianism were superseded at the height of the "war on terror" by those of preventing state failure, transnational terrorism and WMD proliferation, and in promoting "good" governance as the cure for these problems. This shift is consistent with the historic pattern identified by Finnemore (2003) that the purpose of armed interventions change over time in line with changes in the norms of international order. And as I argue below, for satisfied, status-quo powers such as Australia, there is a strong association between upholding international norms and a state's reputation.

Lastly, Fry and Kabutaulaka (2008: 25) state that the Howard government's repeated assertion of its 'special responsibility' for the region was 'a strong part of its legitimating claim to the international community'. I demonstrate in the following section that there is a compelling historical justification for Australia's claim of responsibility to manage state failure and transnational security risks in the South Pacific region on behalf of the West. Fry (2008: 76-8) also canvasses some of the mix of factors identified above. He concludes, however, that it was developments 'in the "war against terror" at the global level and Australia's response to it and to the associated alliance politics that was the determining factor'. I agree with Fry, but seek to show in the remainder of the paper that the motive of reputation is the key to understanding how developments in the war on terror at the global level could translate into armed Australian action in the peripheral Southwest Pacific region.

Australia's Responsibilities in the Southwest Pacific

This section makes an empirical case to support the often-cited “perception” that Australia has a special responsibility for order and security in the Southwest Pacific. Australia's responsibilities in the South Pacific on behalf of its allies date from five agreements and treaties established in the aftermath of the Second World War. In four of these (ANZAC, UKUSA, ANZAM, Radford-Collins) the responsibilities are explicit, while Australia's obligations under ANZUS are tacit.

For Canberra, these post-war strategic agreements initially sought to re-establish an independent British Commonwealth position in the area with Australia at its centre (McLean 2006: 71). But by the early 1950s, British Commonwealth objectives had become firmly integrated with global US Cold War strategy. Prior to this the Australian colonies, and the Commonwealth after 1901, had periodically sought to extend British imperial control in areas of the Pacific, and to exert a more independent influence in nearby islands, but these initiatives were all undertaken within an Empire framework (see Thompson 1980).

The geographical area of responsibility that Australia claimed towards the end of the Second World War, and was recognised later by its allies, was based on the war-time theatre sectors of the Southwest and South Pacific. The Southwest Pacific included insular Southeast Asia, the Australian continent and New Guinea. The South Pacific encompassed the remainder of Melanesia, New Zealand and Polynesia. This area of responsibility was gradually re-defined during the 1960s to cover the more limited area of Papua New Guinea and the non-French parts of the South Pacific. This shift in geography was due to the ending of Australia's forward deployments to Cold War conflicts in East Asia, Suharto's consolidation of power in Indonesia and the

incorporation of West Papua, and an emerging postcolonial awareness of Southeast Asia as a discrete region (Fry 1997: 184-6).

After the tide had turned against Japan in 1944, Australia moved quickly with New Zealand in staking a claim to the post-war management of the Southwest and South Pacific. The Australia-New Zealand Agreement (ANZAC), also known as the Canberra Pact, was signed on 21 January 1944. It stated that within 'a general system of world security, a regional zone of defence comprising the South West and South Pacific areas shall be established' by the signatories. This zone would 'be based on Australia and New Zealand, stretching through the arc of islands North and North East of Australia, to Western Samoa and the Cook Islands' (DFAT 2011). The Agreement was in part directed against the possibility that other powers, presumably the United States, might claim sovereignty over Pacific territories that had been occupied or used as bases during the war (DFAT 2011: Article 16; see also Ball 1944: 220; Olssen 1944; Grattan 1961: 194). The signatories asserted that they must be party to any agreement whereby territorial sovereignty or the 'system of control' was changed from the pre-war status-quo (DFAT 2011: Article 27).

The first formal arrangement by which Australia was designated an area of responsibility by its allies was the UKUSA intelligence agreement of 1947-48. Ball (2001: 50) argues that this relationship remains at the core of the Australia-United States alliance and 'as Australia's most important strategic asset'. The UKUSA Agreement includes the UK, USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand and denotes a series of secret 'agreements, exchanges of letters and memoranda of common understandings' signed in 1947. Australia is specifically tasked under the Agreement with intelligence responsibility for the eastern Indian Ocean, parts of Southeast Asia,

predominantly Indonesia, and the Southwest Pacific (Richelson and Ball 1985: 142-3).

Despite the expanding ties with Washington, the British Commonwealth connection still retained significant emphasis. In 1950 the ANZAM region was delineated between the UK, Australia and New Zealand independent of the United States. ANZAM established a naval defence area covering the eastern Indian Ocean, the Malayan (Malaya, Borneo, Indonesia and Dutch New Guinea) and Australia-New Zealand areas (PNG and Pacific south of the equator and west of 170°) (*FRUS* 1954: 225; Radford-Collins Agreement 1957; Millar 1965: 69-70). The ANZAM agreement gave British recognition to the areas of responsibility delineated earlier in the ANZAC Pact. The Australia-New Zealand area specified in the 1950 ANZAM agreement is equivalent to the Southwest Pacific region from PNG to Fiji that Australia currently claims as a sphere of responsibility.

In March 1951, the ANZAM area of responsibility was recognised by the Commander-in-Chief Pacific, Admiral Radford, on behalf of the United States. The 1951 Radford-Collins agreement was revised in 1957 and remains in effect today. Boundaries between ANZAM and US spheres of responsibility were designated and command and control coordinated (Radford-Collins Agreement 1957; Sea Power Centre Australia 2007). That the agreement was entered into by Australia under Rear Admiral Collins, rather than by a Royal Navy representative, shows that Australia's interests in the Pacific, and its relationship with the United States, were eclipsing those of a declining Britain. The Radford-Collins Agreement is seen by Washington 'as constituting an Australia obligation' under the ANZUS alliance, which was signed in September 1951 (Mediansky 1987: 157).

The ANZUS Treaty does not deal specifically with spheres of responsibility, but over time tacit understandings have developed (Young 1994: 196). Some of the clearest public statements of this from the American side were articulated in a 1978 US Senate Hearing of the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs. In response to a question about ANZUS cooperation in the South Pacific, Richard Holbrooke, then Assistant Secretary of State, said that '[i]t is our belief that at the present time, Australia and New Zealand still carry, and should carry, the larger percentage of the responsibility in the region' (US Senate Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs 1978: 9; see also Herr 1983: 279-80; 1984: 186-8). This understanding of Australia's responsibilities was reflected in the incoming Hawke Labor government's 1983 review of ANZUS. Foreign Minister Hayden reiterated that the alliance 'is a commitment of national and mutual responsibility. It is our duty to discharge those responsibilities prudently if we are to sustain the Treaty' (Official Hansard 1983: 859).

The formal "divorce" of New Zealand from ANZUS in 1986 did little to change regional responsibilities in a practical sense (Young 1988: 781-3). And while Australia has been keen to demonstrate that it is not a direct surrogate for the United States in the South Pacific, its 'shared regional interests' have tended to ensure that Australia's 'influence is generally directed at objectives serving U.S. and broader Western interests' (Dorrance 1992: 111). The 1987 *Defence of Australia* White Paper reaffirmed 'Australia's natural association with the Western community of nations' and its 'attendant defence interests and obligations' (Commonwealth of Australia 1987: 10).

All of the above agreements and treaties remain in force. They designate and specify for Australia a range of defence and security responsibilities in the Southwest

Pacific, both explicit and tacit, on behalf of the West. It is a reasonable conclusion to draw from this survey that Australia, under the Howard government, was historically justified in claiming a managerial responsibility in the Southwest Pacific region on behalf of its traditional allies – the then “coalition of the willing”.

The Howard Government: Responsibility and the “War on Terror”

This section establishes the close connection between the Howard government’s perception of its responsibility for keeping order in the Southwest Pacific and the reputational norms of the liberal-democratic core of the international community with which Australian governments closely identify. **The Howard government’s approach on coming to office in 1996 placed greater emphasis than its Labor predecessor on the US alliance over Asian regionalism; bilateral relations over multilateral forums; and the explicit linking of “national values” to foreign policy (Baldino 2005: 189).** The orientation of Australia’s foreign policy at the time of the Solomon Islands’ intervention is best encapsulated by the White Paper released in June 2003.

In the wake of 9/11, the “war on terror” and the 2002 Bali bombings, the 2003 White Paper leads with “values” rather than “interests”. Australia is identified as ‘a liberal democracy with a proud commitment to political and economic freedom’ (DFAT 2003a: 2-3). The democratic peace theory is enunciated in the statement that Australia has a long tradition of defending and promoting liberal democracy around the world, thus contributing to a safer and more secure world. The promotion of liberal democratic values was demonstrated in the East Timor intervention and participation in the war against terrorism. Australia’s deep links with other Anglosphere countries was based on “trust” **(DFAT 2003a: 2-3), presumably absent or in lesser supply with other states.**

The White Paper (DFAT 2003a: 92) claimed ‘special responsibilities’ in the South Pacific and in strategic terms argued the longstanding view that ‘instability in the South Pacific affects our ability to protect large and significant approaches to Australia’ (DFAT 2003a: 93). The Southwest Pacific was singled out as a region in which Australia saw a direct risk to its security interests: the region’s small and weak states faced ‘daunting political, economic and social problems and rising levels of discontent and crime’. These increasing problems and South Pacific states’ vulnerability as potential transit points for transnational crime and terrorism were attributed to poor “governance” (DFAT 2003a: 93). **The assumption that fragile states and poor governance in the South Pacific could be a tangible security risk to Australia is explainable only through the prism of the war on terror and Canberra’s close alignment with Washington. This assumption is also buttressed by Australia’s strategic culture that views stability in the archipelagic Southeast Asian and Southwest Pacific regions as a vital security interest in denying the penetration of extra-regional powers (Ayson 2007: 222-23).**

The prominence assigned to Solomon Islands by Canberra in mid-2003 was closely linked to how Australia sees its position and role in the unipolar system. From Canberra’s perspective, as a close US ally in a low priority region, Australia is expected to play a managerial role in line with Washington’s international order preferences (Albinski 2002: 157). The historical evidence outlined above strongly supports this perception. In the post-9/11 era, promoting international order norms of good governance in Australia’s “patch” became a matter of reputation vis-à-vis the United States and the liberal-democratic core of the international community. The remainder of the article demonstrates how the Howard government’s reputational concerns in the war on terror intersected with its historical responsibility for

maintaining order in the Southwest Pacific region, leading to the intervention in Solomon Islands.

Responsibility and Reputation in the Solomon Islands' Crisis

This section examines the period from the coup in Honiara of 5 June 2000 until the intervention took place on 24 July 2003. I show that Canberra initially viewed the Solomon Islands' crisis through the prism of "ethnic conflict" requiring a traditional UN-style peacekeeping response. **This changed markedly from mid-2002 as the ramifications of the 9/11 attacks and the Bush administration's war on terror were assimilated into Australia's security policy thinking. It was only then that the armed ethno-political rivalry and criminal lawlessness in Solomon Islands began to directly engage Canberra's reputational concerns. In the first half of 2003, the ongoing disorder in Solomon Islands became indelibly linked with poor governance across the South Pacific region more broadly, thereby giving rise to a raft of potential transnational security threats, some arguably genuine though very minor, such as drug trafficking and money laundering, and others rhetorical, such as people smuggling and terrorism. The situation in Solomon Islands, however limited, thus began to be viewed through the prism of the failed state discourses of the war on terror.**

The 5 June 2000 coup in Honiara, and the events leading up to it since late-1998, were regarded by Australian officials in the region as a serious escalation of the low-level disorder and poor governance that generally prevailed. The Howard government did immediately condemn the coup action, but soon came under criticism for having refused repeated requests from Honiara for Australian police. Howard was very clear at this time that postcolonial sensibilities had to be respected. The Prime Minister said on 7 June that 'I don't think small Pacific Island countries like the idea

of Australia presuming to rule the roost as the policeman of the region' (Prime Minister of Australia 2000). Downer ridiculed media calls for intervention, saying the government would not be engaging 'in gunboat diplomacy every time an ethnic conflict erupted in the Asia-Pacific region' (AAP 2000). Prior to 9/11 and the rise of transnational security issues to the top of the international agenda, governance problems in the South Pacific did not resonate as a reputational concern for Australian policy makers.

In mid-2002, lawlessness and criminality in fragile states began to be linked with transnational terrorism, international order and the US alliance, predominantly at this time by Defence Minister Robert Hill. Hill (2002) argued on 18 June that the 1990s concerns of 'ethnic, religious and separatist conflict' had now become intertwined with 'a range of transnational issues ... such as organised drug smuggling, people smuggling and terrorism'. It had taken 'the tragic events of 11 September to reveal starkly the new contours and fault-lines of a very different strategic landscape'. The United States was 'clearly no longer going to allow problems to fester and threats to remain unresolved'. This was a position shared by Australia (Hill, 2002). **The evidence suggests that the situation in Solomon Islands only began to strongly engage Australia's reputational concerns in the emerging international order climate of the war on terror.**

By mid-2002, the Solomon Islands' crisis was also attracting negative international attention, thereby directly damaging Australia's reputation. The European Commission (EC) and UN jointly released a major report on conflict in the South Pacific in June 2002. The report was highly critical of a number of Australia's initiatives in Solomon Islands. It stated that the Australian-sponsored Townsville Peace Agreement (TPA) of October 2000 was a failure (Retiere and Schurmann-

Zeggel 2002: 7). **The TPA did not include all militia leaders in the peace process, nor did it include civil society representatives. Australia led an unarmed and neutral International Peace Monitoring Team (IPMT) to support the peace process under the auspices of a local Peace Monitoring Council (PMC). But arms decommissioning proved to be ineffective. The militias were reluctant to disarm without an impartial and effective police force in place. The IPMT departed on 25 June 2002 with an estimated 500 military-style weapons still at large (Fraenkel 2004: 142). The EC/UN report observed that the IPMT was leaving Solomon Islands not because their job was done, but because there was ‘no genuine peace to monitor’ (Retiere and Schurmann-Zeggel 2002: 23).** While there is no public mention of this report by Australian officials, it cannot have been favourably received by the Howard government, which was always sensitive to such international criticisms, especially from the UN.

The post-9/11 climate of transnational security threats was acutely heightened for Australia by the 12 October 2002 terrorist attacks in Bali in which 88 Australians were killed. A series of violent and chaotic events occurred in Honiara in December 2002 against this wider backdrop of the war on terror, Bali bombings and increasing international attention on Solomon Islands. Police demanding “compensation” fired on Prime Minister Kemakeza’s house on 13 December. Extortion payments were made, government ministers quit and Kemakeza survived a no confidence motion in Parliament. The political chaos of December was catalyst for further proposals for intervention within government in Canberra and Wellington.

Downer revealed on 10 June 2003 that it was in December 2002 that he had started to realise that the situation was no longer tenable. He made direct reference to both Australia’s special responsibility for the South Pacific and its international

reputation in being seen to keep order in the region. Downer said, ‘if we don’t fix up Solomon Islands no-one will be able to. We’re the only country with the capability to do this’ (DFAT 2003b). He then made the crucial point of reputation that ‘the international community looks to Australia to ensure that the South Pacific is a stable part of the world’. Australia’s responsibility to prevent state failure in the region was directly attributed to transnational threats: ‘drug trafficking in particular, money laundering, people trafficking, all these sorts of activities could readily take place within the sovereign boundaries of a failed state’ (DFAT 2003b). This comment reflects the abovementioned shift in interventionist norms that occurred during the war on terror.

Later on 10 June, Downer launched an influential report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), *Our Failing Neighbour*. The report declared that Solomon Islands was ‘a failing state’. **It was well on the way** to becoming ‘effectively ungoverned’ thereby giving rise to potential transnational threats (ASPI 2003: 6). In referring to Australia’s special responsibilities in the region, the report highlights the connection between Australia’s responsibility and its international reputation:

... state failure in the Southwest Pacific reflects badly on Australia. Other countries, including major allies and friends, expect Australia to take a leading role in this part of the world, and judge us in part on how well we discharge what they tend to see as our responsibilities here. Australia’s standing in the wider world – including with the United States – is therefore at stake.

(ASPI 2003: 14-5)

Howard repeated in Parliament on 25 June that the international community ‘naturally and understandably expects Australia to play a leading role’ (Official Hansard 2003: 17483-4). In a television interview on the same day, Howard said again that ‘the rest of the world expects Australia to shoulder a lot of the burden because this is our part

of the world, this is our patch'. The designation of the South Pacific as "our patch" was thereafter a prominent theme in Howard's rhetoric (Prime Minister of Australia 2003a).

As the intervention became imminent, Howard repeatedly emphasised Australia's international responsibility for "our patch" and the damage to the country's reputation if it failed to act decisively to restore order in Solomon Islands. On the Nine Network's *Today Show* on 23 July 2003, Howard said, in a turn of phrase redolent of the Bush administration, that

... if we do nothing and the country slides into further anarchy and it then becomes a haven for evil doers, whether they're involved in terrorism or drugs or money laundering ... we'll rightly be condemned, not only by the Australian people but also by countries around the world. This is our patch and we do have a special responsibility here ...

(Prime Minister of Australia 2003b)

The corruption, criminality and armed political conflict in Solomon Islands were in clear breach of international order in the acute transnational threat environment that developed between 2001 and 2003. Australia's rhetoric and actions in Solomon Islands were consistent with the reputational norms prevailing at that time. Restoring order and improving governance in Australia's South Pacific sphere of responsibility would bolster Canberra's reputation in the war on terror with the United States, and more broadly, with the developed core of the international community with which Australian governments closely identify.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the Howard government's primary motive for its intervention in Solomon Islands was to bolster Australia's international reputation by fulfilling its responsibility to maintain regional order in the war on terror. While a number of motives have been analysed previously in interpreting the decision-making

behind RAMSI, none have emphasised reputation as the primary motive. Where it has been noted at all, reputation appears as a supplementary motive. This is despite it being stated by Howard and Downer with increasing explicitness and forcefulness in the weeks leading up to the intervention. The reputational motive is consistent with the war on terror political climate of threat perception, responsibility and risk management, and indeed, provides the key to explaining how transnational security concerns at the global level could translate into Australian action in the peripheral Southwest Pacific region where any genuine empirical threat was negligible.

In demonstrating this argument, I first made the case that the Howard government had compelling historical justification for Australia's claim to a special responsibility to keep order and manage security threats in the Southwest Pacific region on behalf of its traditional allies, at that time, the "coalition of the willing". I then demonstrated the close connection between Australia's historic responsibility for maintaining order in its region and the reputational norms that developed during the war on terror. These revolved around the prevention of state failure and transnational security problems through the promotion of good governance and capacity building.

The evidence shows that until mid-2002 Canberra viewed the crisis as one of ethnic conflict requiring a political settlement and traditional peacekeeping response. **Canberra's reputational concerns only became engaged when the ongoing situation in Solomon Islands began to resemble the emerging failed state and transnational security discourses of the war on terror.** Public statements focusing on the threat of terrorism, money laundering and people smuggling from the "failing" state of Solomon Islands were evident only after the **October 2002 Bali bombings**. In tandem with this, and increasing in emphasis in the weeks leading up to the intervention, were the repeated assertions that Australia's reputation vis-à-vis the

United States and the international community would be damaged if it failed to keep order in its sphere of responsibility.

Throughout his tenure, Howard consistently identified Australia as an integral part of the liberal-democratic Western “core” of the international community. In the period between 2001 and 2003, preventing state failure and transnational threats were at the top of the global security agenda among Western states. Performing these tasks in Solomon Islands in line with the new interventionist norms of the war on terror was viewed by Canberra as essential to maintaining Australia’s international reputation.

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