

---

# Security in Papua New Guinea: The Military and Diplomatic Dimensions

Stewart Firth

Papua New Guinea is embedded in a regional strategic order dominated by the United States and Australia. The Government of Papua New Guinea recognises the country's security shortcomings and is taking action to remedy them. It plans to more than double the size of the PNG Defence Force to 5,000 regular and reserve personnel by 2017. The core tasks of the PNG Defence Force are to defend PNG against attack and maintain the integrity of its sovereign land, air and maritime borders; to provide civil emergency assistance in security, humanitarian and disaster relief; to engage in nation building; and to participate in international operations in both war zones and humanitarian operations. PNG is now sending peacekeepers to UN operations in Sudan and South Sudan. Regionally, the PNGDF has emerged with a good reputation after ten years with the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands. Borders present problems. Both the PNG-Indonesia border and the PNG-Australia border require continuing bilateral cooperation. The Pan-Melanesianism of the Melanesian Spearhead Group poses difficulties for PNG in its relations with Indonesia. Australia matters most as a defence partner for PNG, but the Manus asylum seeker processing centre is undermining Australia's advocacy of maintaining high standards in delivering security. The military mood is buoyant in PNG, but PNG's security problems are fundamentally developmental and political and will not be solved quickly.

Like other Pacific Island countries, Papua New Guinea is embedded in a regional strategic order that remains unchanged almost seventy years after the end of World War II. The United States is predominant militarily, supported by a string of military alliances with Australia, Korea, Japan and the Philippines. American military bases stretch from Hawai'i to Guam, Japan and Korea and American forces rotate through northern Australia. Papua New Guinea, which consisted of two bordering Australian territories in World War II, both invaded by Japan, has been independent for nearly forty years and looks to Australia and the United States for its strategic security. The Joint Declaration of Principles of 1987 requires Australia and PNG to "consult about matters affecting their common security in the event of external armed attack threatening the national sovereignty of either country" and is interpreted on both sides as an undertaking, falling somewhat short of a cast-iron guarantee, that Australia would come to the defence of PNG.<sup>1</sup> Under the security provisions of the Joint Declaration for a New Papua New Guinea-Australia Partnership, signed in 2013, bilateral defence relations will

---

<sup>1</sup> R. J. May, *State and Society in Papua New Guinea: The First Twenty-Five Years* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2004), p. 259.

deepen and Australia will do more to strengthen the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF).

A stable and enduring Pacific strategic order is accompanied by a fast changing economic order as the shift of global production to East Asia creates new opportunities for Pacific Island countries, and especially for resource-rich PNG. In the last decade PNG's economy—as traditional economics measures these things—has grown consistently at rates more like those of East Asia than of the neighbouring Pacific Islands. A consortium of companies led by ExxonMobil's PNG LNG is spending US \$19 billion on the construction phase of the project, and is exporting liquefied natural gas to Japan, China and Taiwan, creating unprecedented growth potential. China, though not the largest foreign investor, is growing in importance to PNG as a market and source of investment. The most important Chinese investment in the Pacific region is Ramu NiCo, which mines nickel, cobalt and chromite near Madang, Papua New Guinea, and has built a refinery on the coast at Basamuk Bay. Ramu NiCo expects to export these minerals for the next twenty years.

Like many other countries in the Asia-Pacific, PNG confronts a potential future mismatch between its strategic ties to the United States and its economic ties to China. PNG's 2013 Defence White Paper points out that the United States is still “the pre-eminent global economic and military power and will continue to be so for years to come”, yet at the same time China's “rise to the second largest economy on earth continues to have an upward trajectory and is matched by its growing influence around the world”. PNG “is a friend to both countries, has traditional security links with the United States and developing relations with China”.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Papua New Guinea Defence Force**

The PNGDF is small even for a small country, with about 2,000 personnel in its land, maritime and air elements. With Australian assistance, the Government of PNG halved PNGDF numbers from about 4,000 to 2,000 after 2002, following a series of incidents arising from serious lack of discipline, including a mutiny at Moem Barracks in Wewak, where buildings were burnt down and soldiers had to be arrested. In recent years, the LNG boom has added to recruitment problems by attracting officers and soldiers to higher paying jobs in the private sector. The restructuring of the PNGDF, however, had useful consequences. The presence of soldiers in Southern Highlands Province in 2007, for example, ensured that the elections would proceed rather than fail as happened in 2002, and members of the PNGDF gained a good reputation for their performance during the ten years of their

---

<sup>2</sup> Government of PNG, *Defence White Paper 2013, Defending PNG's Prosperity* (Port Moresby: Papua New Guinea Defence Organisation, 2013), pp. 17-18.

military presence of the Regional Assistance Mission in Solomon Islands 2003-2013.

The Government of PNG has now taken a further step and produced the country's first ever National Security Policy together with the first Defence White Paper since 1999. Speaking at the launch of the two papers in 2013, Prime Minister Peter O'Neill conceded that PNG's national security had

lacked cohesion and effective coordination since Independence. Our response to security issues have been largely disjointed as a result. Our national security institutions have been neglected to the extent where they lack appropriate capabilities to provide effective public safety and protection of our natural resources and our international borders. But we must not sit back and languish, and blame others for what we have not done. My Government is committed to addressing and improving our security. The Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary's Modernisation Program and the PNG Defence White Paper 2013 are examples of the work we are putting in improving this sector.<sup>3</sup>

The government proposes to more than double the size of the PNGDF, from 2,000 to 4,000 regular personnel and 1,000 reserves by 2017, with a further doubling to 10,000 by 2030.<sup>4</sup>

According to the White Paper, the core tasks of the PNGDF are to defend PNG against attack and maintain the integrity of its sovereign land, air and maritime borders; to provide civil emergency assistance in security, humanitarian and disaster relief; to engage in nation building; and to participate in international operations in both war zones and humanitarian operations.

Let us examine these core tasks one by one. The capacity of PNG's security agencies "has declined considerably" since independence, according to the Defence White Paper,

causing significant security gaps along our land, air and maritime borders. Porous and uncontrolled borders have allowed transnational crime such as the illegal smuggling of small arms, light weapons and contraband to continue unabated.<sup>5</sup>

Poor border control also permits the plundering of the country's fish stocks and timber "at an alarming rate".<sup>6</sup> For this reason, controlling the borders requires that the PNGDF be modernised and revitalised.

The Defence White Paper is right to point to the difficulties of policing PNG's vast maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which is 3.1 million square

---

<sup>3</sup> Peter O'Neill, Speech at Murray Barracks, Port Moresby, 20 December 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Government of Papua New Guinea, *Defence White Paper 2013*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

kilometres in extent and includes seven maritime borders. One estimate is that PNG loses one billion kina (AUD \$500 million) annually in fishing revenue as a result of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in this zone.<sup>7</sup> Like other Pacific countries, PNG has used Pacific Patrol Boats donated by Australia to police its EEZ, and will do so in the future now that Australia has announced the Pacific Maritime Security Program, which aims to provide an updated version of the patrol boat program from 2018. Under the old scheme, Australia funded refits of the boats and brought crews to the Australian Maritime College for training, as well as supplying Navy personnel as advisers. Under the new program, Pacific EEZ surveillance might be directed by a regional maritime coordination centre based in Solomon Islands, but whatever form it takes, PNG's ageing patrol boats will be replaced. The task of EEZ surveillance and enforcement is best performed regionally and with the support of powerful allies, as happens annually in the Forum Fisheries Agency's Operation Kurukuru, a coordinated maritime operation covering the exclusive economic zones of fifteen Pacific countries including PNG. Vessels and aircraft of the Quadrilateral Defence Partner countries (Australia, New Zealand, France and the United States) provide robust support to Pacific patrol boats in the search for poachers. In 2013 the Operation covered 30 million square kilometres, included PNG's EEZ, and involved twelve Pacific patrol boats, whose crews participated in boarding more than 100 fishing vessels.<sup>8</sup>

Alone among Pacific Island countries, PNG has a land border. Originating in the colonial partition of the island of New Guinea between the Netherlands, Germany and Great Britain in the nineteenth century, the border was inherited by Indonesia when it assumed control of west New Guinea from the Dutch in 1963 and became the dividing line, 760 km long, between Indonesia and the new state of PNG in 1975. Since then the border has been the occasion of numerous minor disputes between the two countries and a major one in the mid-1980s, when thousands of West Papuans fled into PNG as refugees following a crackdown by Indonesian military forces on West Papuan independence activists. By 1986 as many as 12,000 West Papuans had crossed into PNG seeking refuge, and soon afterwards PNG and Indonesia signed a Treaty of Mutual Respect, Cooperation, and Friendship, agreeing to "avoid, reduce and contain disputes or conflicts between their nations and settle any differences that may arise only by peaceful means" (Article 2), and promising not to threaten or use force

---

<sup>7</sup> David Feeney, speech at Papua New Guinea Conference, 5 April 2013, <<http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/2013/04/05/parliamentary-secretary-for-defence-speech-papua-new-guinea-security-through-leadership/>> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

<sup>8</sup> 'National Participation Key To Success of Fisheries Surveillance Operation: Kurukuru 2013 Ends', Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, 21 October 2013, <<http://www.ffa.int/node/787>> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

against each other (Article 7).<sup>9</sup> Observers were unsure whether the treaty added anything to the security of the border, but by the early 1990s PNG and Indonesia had signed a “status of forces” agreement.

Further border agreements have followed, in 1990, 1992, 2003, and most recently in 2013, when PNG Prime Minister Peter O’Neill led a delegation of ministers to Jakarta seeking an improvement in bilateral relations. Both sides agreed on softer border management after PNG closed the border crossing near Jayapura for three weeks.<sup>10</sup> Smugglers have for years brought guns and ammunition from Indonesia across the border, landing them on the beaches at Vanimo before they are taken further into PNG, especially the Highlands. Political violence persists. Militants of the separatist *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* or OPM, who seek an independent West Papua, continue to attack Indonesian targets. In April 2014, for example, a group of about thirty separatists removed the Indonesian flag in favour of the Bintang Kejora or Morning Star flag, symbol of West Papuan independence, and destroyed government property at the border near Jayapura. Indonesian soldiers were reported to have killed three protesters in a shoot-out which lasted for hours, and the Indonesian authorities then closed the border gate at Skouw-Wutung after West Papuans fled into PNG.<sup>11</sup> As in 2013, the border remained closed for weeks, and even after it was opened again, the PNGDF was preventing PNG citizens from crossing into Indonesia on the grounds that OPM activists posed a security problem.<sup>12</sup>

The maritime border between PNG and Australia leaves the Torres Strait islands in Australian territory. Some, such as Saibai, are only a few kilometres from the PNG coast, and under the 1978 Torres Strait Treaty, which came into effect in 1985, PNG citizens from thirteen nominated villages may make traditional visits to what is called the Torres Strait Protected Zone, which extends to 10 degrees 30 minutes south latitude in Australian territory. Tens of thousands of Papua New Guineans take up this opportunity each year, and PNG Customs, Immigration and Police personnel regularly conduct joint border patrols with Australian Customs and Border Security, Australian Federal Police and Queensland Police in the search for

---

<sup>9</sup> ‘Indonesia-Papua New Guinea’, Mongabay.com, <[http://www.mongabay.com/history/indonesia/indonesia-papua\\_new\\_guinea.html](http://www.mongabay.com/history/indonesia/indonesia-papua_new_guinea.html)> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

<sup>10</sup> ‘RI, PNG Agree to “Soft” Border Approach’, *Jakarta Post*, 18 June 2013.

<sup>11</sup> ‘RI-PNG Border Closed after Shoot-out, Three Gunmen Claimed Dead’, *Jakarta Post*, 7 April 2014.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Wutung Border Between PNG, Indonesia Still Closed, Unsafe: PNG Defence Force Offers No Guaranty of Protection for Citizens’, *PNG Post-Courier*, April 2014.

illegal movement of guns, drugs and money, as well as for vessels engaging in illegal fishing.<sup>13</sup>

The border raises issues not just of smuggling and people movement, but also of human security in the form of threats to health. For years Papua New Guineans made the short trip to the Australian islands of Saibai and Boigu in order to receive treatment for tuberculosis (TB), a serious health problem in PNG, where the prevalence rate—534 per 100,000 people in 2011—is high by global standards and very high by Pacific standards. At that time the Australian health clinics were treating sixty PNG nationals for TB, some with the multi-drug-resistant form of the disease. The Australian and Queensland governments have since closed the clinics to Papua New Guinean patients, opting instead to strengthen the health system on the PNG side of the border. Daru Hospital opened a new TB isolation ward in 2013, and Australia is funding World Vision to train community-based health workers, as well as providing a sea ambulance and boats for health service access to the South Fly District. A visiting World Health Organization team found evidence in 2012 of better diagnosis, training and infection control as a result of these new measures,<sup>14</sup> but not everyone is convinced that the change in arrangements is for the better, given PNG's patchy record in delivering health services in rural areas. Following criticism of the closure of the Australian clinics to Papua New Guineans, the Queensland Department of Health claimed that:

any re-opening of the Saibai and Boigu island tuberculosis clinics for Papua New Guinea nationals is likely to increase the risk of cross-border infection for the Torres Strait. It would also increase the risk of drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB) entering Queensland. A locally-controlled program, as endorsed by the World Health Organization, is the most effective method of combating TB in PNG.<sup>15</sup>

The security of Australia, as the TB issue shows, depends in part on the success of PNG as a developing state and on the effectiveness of its public health system.

As happens in the case of the Torres Strait, people move back and forth across the border on PNG's north-eastern flank between Bougainville and Solomon Islands. During the armed conflict in Bougainville in the 1990s, hundreds of Bougainvilleans found refuge in Choiseul Province and some

---

<sup>13</sup> Sean Dorney 'Joint Border Patrols Enhance Relations Between PNG, Australia. PNG Citizens Allowed Traditional Entry to Torres Strait without Visa', *Radio Australia*, 14 November 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'Papua New Guinea: Tuberculosis Management in Western Province', <<http://aid.dfat.gov.au/countries/pacific/png/Pages/tb-png.aspx#australia>> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

<sup>15</sup> Department of Health, Queensland Government, Media Statement, Torres Strait TB Clinics Statement, 21 February 2013.

took guns with them, adding to the store of firearms later used during the tensions in Solomon Islands. But since the end of hostilities on Bougainville more than fifteen years ago, the border has reverted to its role as a peaceful and artificial dividing line between related communities. Solomon Islands has now built a border post at Taro Island, Choiseul Province, and there is talk of establishing two border control posts on Bougainville.<sup>16</sup>

The second core task of the PNGDF is to provide civil emergency assistance in security, humanitarian and disaster relief, and the Defence White Paper envisages the PNGDF developing its capabilities as a first responder to disasters and to acts of “terrorism, piracy, sabotage, hostage and hijack”.<sup>17</sup> All of this is unexceptionable while at the same raising the key issue of affordability inherent in the ambitions of the White Paper in general.

The third core task is to engage in nation-building and contribute to national development, including providing security for national elections as in 2007 and 2012, and creating a secure environment for the South Pacific Defence Ministers’ Meeting in 2014, the Pacific Games in 2015 and APEC in 2018. APEC is a huge international event that tests the capabilities of much larger countries and will certainly test those of PNG. The broader aim is to “develop PNGDF capabilities in Engineering, Health, Signals, the ability to provide government patrols into ‘inaccessible’ terrain as well as Land, Maritime and Air mobility platforms to contribute to nation building”. The Defence Organisation will “assist with relieving the national ‘Youth Bulge’ problem by building the Reserve Force, introducing the school cadet system and developing a National Service scheme”.<sup>18</sup>

The idea that the PNGDF should engage in nation-building is not new and has not been successful in the past. As the former Australian Parliamentary Secretary for Defence David Feeney pointed out in 2013,

PNG tried ‘security-for-development’ approaches with only mixed success in the early to mid-1990s. And, some would argue the tide-of-history suggests the great success stories of our day, such as Indonesia, are all moving to reduce their militaries’ day-to-day involvement in internal security, governance and the market.<sup>19</sup>

An expanded nation-building role for the PNGDF, especially a bigger PNGDF, might tempt it to adopt a directly political role, as happened briefly in 2012 when a small group of soldiers arrested the force commander in support of Sir Michael Somare’s attempt to regain the prime ministership. The Sandline affair in 1997, when the PNGDF seized a group of

---

<sup>16</sup> ‘Solomon Islands Govt Funds PNG-SI Border Post’, *Islands Business*, 27 May 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Government of PNG, *Defence White Paper 2013*, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Feeney, speech at Papua New Guinea Conference.

mercenaries imported by the government, was another case of minor mutiny, but for the most part the force has been loyal to the civil power since independence.

The fourth core task of the PNGDF, according to the new Defence White Paper, is to fulfil its international obligations regionally and in UN peacekeeping operations. The Government of PNG amended the Defence Act in 2010 to make deployment of PNGDF soldiers possible beyond the Pacific region, and PNG has since sent military observers to Dafur and South Sudan. The numbers are small—just four PNG military observers in mid-2013, with plans to double that number—compared with those from Fiji, which has been sending its soldiers to UN and multilateral peacekeeping operations since the late 1970s. Fiji has 600 peacekeepers in the UN Disengagement Observer Force on the Golan Heights border between Israel and Syria, and an infantry battalion with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai, where the Fijians monitor three major border crossings between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Nothing on this scale yet exists in the case of the PNGDF, but the initiative in Sudan and South Sudan points to the PNG's ambitions to follow the Fiji example. For Fiji as for PNG, participation in UN peacekeeping not only offers the prospect of financial compensation by the UN, but also the chance to operate on a world stage alongside the military forces of much larger states.

The Defence White Paper speaks of the PNGDF's readiness to participate "in the security components" of the Pacific Islands Forum, the Melanesian Spearhead Group, the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting, and even the Association of South East Asian Nations, where PNG has had special observer status since 1981.<sup>20</sup>

The most important 'security component' of the Pacific Islands Forum in recent years, has been the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), where PNGDF personnel served alongside Australian, New Zealand, Tongan (and for a while Fijian) troops. They were farewelled in Honiara in April 2013, having brought knowledge of Melanesian pidgin and a cultural familiarity that gave them easy access to Solomon Islands communities and smoothed the way for RAMSI's police and civilians. The performance of the platoons rotated regularly through Solomon Islands earned respect of a kind that was new to the PNGDF.

The regional statement of principles that provided justification for RAMSI is the Biketawa Declaration, signed by PNG and all other Forum states in 2000. The Declaration, drawn up a few months after a coup in Fiji and the forcible removal of a government in Solomon Islands, commits Forum countries to certain motherhood principles, beginning with good governance and including "belief in the liberty of the individual under the law" and "the

---

<sup>20</sup> Government of PNG, *Defence White Paper 2013*, p. 30.



peaceful transfer of power, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government". More importantly, the Declaration recognises "the vulnerability of member countries to threats to their security, broadly defined, and the importance of cooperation among members in dealing with such threats when they arise" and provides for graduated steps that the Forum might take in response "in time of crisis" in a member state. The Declaration did not specify armed intervention of the kind that transpired in Solomon Islands in 2003, but provided for consultation by Forum ministers and "targeted measures", and when the time came its language was general enough to provide legal cover for the regional intervention.<sup>21</sup> Regional security in the Pacific implies the internal security of Pacific states, not only in Solomon Islands but also in its far larger neighbour PNG.

### Internal Security Issues and the Police

By some measures PNG has experienced more serious and more persistent security crises than Solomon Islands. Whereas perhaps 200 people were killed during the Solomon Islands tensions, many more—thousands in all—were losing their lives in violent conflict in those parts of PNG that lay largely beyond the pale of government authority, such as Southern Highlands Province in the decade from about 2000. Tribal fighting remains common in some parts of the Highlands. It was reported in February 2014, for example, that:

thousands of people living between the Chimbu-Jiwaka borders all the way to Minj have been missing out on vital government services for years due to constant tribal fighting. Just two weeks after leaders in the area promised to stop fighting and other crimes in front of Supt Tondop, a fight erupted between the Golukup and Tulumkup tribes which resulted in the death of four people and massive destruction to property.<sup>22</sup>

The Government of PNG, however, has never defined such conflict and loss of life as a security crisis of the kind that might invoke the regional protections of the Biketawa Declaration, nor have they asked the Pacific Islands Forum for security assistance.

In those cases where PNG has accepted help with security, it has been for the country's urban centres, directed at establishing conditions of law and order in PNG's capital, Port Moresby, and in towns such as Lae. The *Economist* Intelligence Unit's liveability ranking of cities placed Port Moresby in the worst ten in 2013, along with Harare, Lagos and Dhaka.<sup>23</sup> Security companies thrive in Port Moresby and elsewhere in PNG because they

---

<sup>21</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Islands Forum, "'Biketawa' Declaration", 2000, <<http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/Biketawa%20Declaration,%2028%20October%202002.pdf>> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

<sup>22</sup> 'Highlands Region: Rival Jiwaka Clans Urged To Stop War', *Post-Courier*, 3 February 2014.

<sup>23</sup> 'The World's Least Liveable Cities', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 September 2013.

provide the conditions of personal safety that police do not deliver. All sorts of daily tasks in Port Moresby can be unsafe for people to undertake, from catching the bus to buying goods at a market, filling a car with petrol or getting back to a settlement after dark.

Recognising this situation, PNG agreed to take a Police Assistance Package from Australia in 2004, with the aim of putting more than 200 police on the streets of Port Moresby and assisting with criminal investigations. The first Australian police, based at Gordon Police Station in Port Moresby, began street patrols in December 2004, but the entire Australian contingent withdrew in May 2005 after the PNG Supreme Court ruled the deployment unconstitutional. At issue was the legal immunity of Australian police in PNG, seen as a slight to the country's sovereignty, although the PNGDF were accepting similar immunity for their own soldiers in Solomon Islands at the same time. The episode revealed the potential for initiatives of this kind to produce a nationalist backlash against Australia. Bilateral relations between Australia and PNG were strained in the last years of the Howard Government, but the election of the Rudd Government in 2007 put police cooperation back on the agenda, and led to the inauguration of the PNG-Australia Policing Partnership the following year. The Partnership is now in Phase IV, and a new generation of AFP officers has been deployed to PNG, arriving in late 2013. Unlike their predecessors a decade ago, they do not have direct policing powers, although they accompany Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC) officers on foot and vehicle patrols both in Port Moresby and Lae. Their task is to guide and assist the RPNGC in a wide range of areas from community policing to managing police stations, controlling traffic, conducting criminal investigations and dealing with sexual offences.<sup>24</sup> The paramilitary police mobile squads in PNG have gained a reputation for harshness, even brutality, and it would be in Australia's interest, as well as PNG's, to use the Policing Partnership now and in the future to curb those tendencies.

### **Sub-Regional Security: the Melanesian Spearhead Group**

PNG is the largest member state of the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), a sub-regional body that originated in pan-Melanesian sentiments of the 1980s, when PNG, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and to a lesser extent Fiji were expressing solidarity with the independence movement in New Caledonia and its struggle against French colonial rule. Membership of the MSG therefore consists not only of states—the four Melanesian ones—but also of a political party, the *Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste* (FLNKS). In fact the present MSG chair, Victor Tutugoro, is a member of the FLNKS. Frank Bainimarama's 2006 coup isolated Fiji, especially when he failed to hold promised elections in 2009. Fiji was suspended from the

---

<sup>24</sup> Australian Federal Police, Media Release: Australian Federal Police Officers Arrive To Work Alongside Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary, 5 November 2013.

Pacific Islands Forum, and Bainimarama turned his diplomatic energies elsewhere, becoming chair of the MSG in 2011 and investing it with a new significance. In recent years the MSG has pursued an active sub-regional agenda, including further trade liberalisation under the MSG Trade Agreement, a Melanesian Green Climate Fund and a Skills Movement Scheme (SMS), which is designed to allow 400 skilled Melanesians—nurses, doctors, engineers, accountants and other professionals—to move freely from one MSG country to another. According to MSG Secretary-General Peter Forau, the scheme offers “preferential treatment to parties in the MSG SMS to access employment opportunities” and has the additional benefit of providing a framework of accreditation and standards that “will prepare the MSG members to tap into the wider international labour market where there are more relatively lucrative opportunities”.<sup>25</sup> In other words, Forau sees skilled labour mobility between Melanesian countries as a stepping stone for Pacific Islanders to the labour markets of Australia, New Zealand and other advanced economies.

As MSG Chair, Bainimarama wanted to expand the role of the organisation beyond trade, labour and environmental arrangements to regional and international security. He pushed for the MSG to set up its own Melanesian peacekeeping unit, which would be offered to the UN worldwide, and initiated the creation of a department of peacekeeping operations at the MSG Secretariat. Any peacekeeping unit of this kind, if it were to eventuate, would almost certainly be organised and led by the peacekeeping specialists of the Pacific, the Fijians, rather than by PNG.

Pan-Melanesianism has its complications for PNG. At its 2013 meeting, the MSG had to decide on an application for membership from the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation (WPNCL), which seeks the independence of West Papua from Indonesia. The MSG endorsed “the inalienable rights of the people of West Papua towards self-determination as provided for under the preamble of the MSG constitution” and that “the concerns of the MSG regarding the human rights violations and other forms of atrocities relating to the West Papuan people be raised with the Government of Indonesia bilaterally and as a Group”.<sup>26</sup> On the question of membership by the WPNCL, it was decided to investigate the issue further by accepting Indonesia’s invitation to host a fact-finding visit to West Papua by Melanesian foreign ministers. PNG’s deputy Prime Minister Leo Dion, in the absence of Peter O’Neill, made clear that his country sees West Papua as an integral part of Indonesia and does not support its independence. He could hardly say anything else, given PNG’s long-standing acceptance of the integrity and permanence of Indonesia’s border on the island of New Guinea.

---

<sup>25</sup> ‘MSG Skills Movement Scheme Comes into Force’, *PacNews*, Port Vila, 5 October 2012.

<sup>26</sup> MSG Secretariat, ‘19th MSG Leaders’ Summit Communiqué’, Escapade Resort, Noumea, New Caledonia, 20 June 2013.

When the MSG ministers went to West Papua in January 2014, sparking a demonstration and a number of arrests, Vanuatu boycotted the mission, claiming Fiji had transformed it from a human rights delegation into a trade and investment initiative. Indonesia joined the MSG as an observer in 2011, and its policy of soft engagement on West Papua replaces one of rigid exclusion, which for many years made official visits of this kind impossible. As an observer, Indonesia is able to bring to MSG meetings anti-independence West Papuans such as Franzalbert Joku, who told the journalist Sean Dorney at the 2013 MSG meeting that the human rights situation in Indonesia had “improved markedly since the process of reforms and democratisation were introduced at the end of the '90s. And that is also reflected in the situation in [the Indonesian province of] Papua.”<sup>27</sup> Indonesia, which has been increasing its engagement with PNG and other Pacific countries in recent years, could be well satisfied with the outcome of the 2014 West Papua mission. In a joint statement issued in Jakarta after the West Papua visit, Indonesia and the MSG declared that they supported “our respective sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and the principle of non-interference in each other’s affairs, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations”, adding that they also backed PNG’s chairmanship of APEC in 2018.<sup>28</sup>

## Diplomatic and Defence Partners

The LNG boom and the steady expansion of the PNG economy in recent years has given the country a new confidence internationally. PNG currently has three diplomatic missions in Australia, two in the United States and Indonesia, and one each in New Zealand, Singapore, Japan, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, China, the Philippines, Malaysia, India, the United Kingdom and Belgium. The government plans to add further missions in Tel Aviv and Paris, to place a second China mission in Shanghai and to open offices in Germany and Vietnam. Israel has been increasingly active in the Pacific Islands, spurred perhaps by the emergence of the United Arab Emirates as an aid donor and diplomatic partner to Pacific countries since 2010. Ties between PNG and Israel are not new, but Peter O’Neill was the first PNG prime minister to make an official visit to Israel, when he held talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2013 and signed an Israel-PNG Joint Declaration of Cooperation. Mr Netanyahu specifically offered PNG assistance “for defence, security and intelligence training” as well as for agriculture and capacity building, and in an accompanying bilateral defence cooperation agreement that was to be signed later, Israel will provide training for PNGDF personnel and police in advance of the APEC meeting in PNG in 2018. Speaking in Jerusalem, O’Neill said:

---

<sup>27</sup> ‘Conflicting Views on West Papua to Join MSG’, *Australia Network*, no date, <<http://australianetwork.com/focus/s3792784.htm>> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

<sup>28</sup> Joint Statement by Indonesia and the Members of the Melanesian Spearhead Group, Jakarta, 16 January 2014.

We are going to send some people over, especially instructors from Bomana police college, Goldie River training depot and Igam Barracks, and also from the police special protection units, to upgrade their skills to provide better protection of leaders who will visit us.<sup>29</sup>

Israel is only one among a number of countries with which PNG has security links. PNG has defence agreements with the United States and New Zealand, and defence relations on a small scale with Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Fiji. After meeting his Chinese counterpart, General Liang Guanglie, in Beijing in 2013, PNG Defence Minister Fabian Pok revealed that the PNGDF would benefit from a US \$2 million dollar grant from China, and said it would be spent on armoured cars, troop carriers and uniforms, as well as maintaining swimming pools and gymnasiums at PNGDF barracks. Pok was quoted as saying China did not want to be seen as becoming too involved in PNG military issues.<sup>30</sup> The United States has responded. In 2014 US Pacific Naval Commander, Admiral Samuel Locklear III held talks with Prime Minister Peter O'Neill in Port Moresby. He confirmed that the US Army would engage in a new training scheme for PNGDF soldiers, and promised US naval support for security at the APEC meeting.<sup>31</sup>

Australia, though, is the defence partner that really matters for PNG. On her visit to PNG in 2013 Julia Gillard joined Peter O'Neill in signing the Joint Declaration for a New Papua New Guinea-Australia Partnership, which includes a commitment to strengthen the "enduring defence relationship" between the two countries and deepen bilateral cooperation on maritime and border security, regional peacekeeping and disaster relief. In financial terms these words mean that Australia will spend more on its defence cooperation program with PNG, already its largest with any country and boosted significantly to AUD \$27 million in 2013-14.<sup>32</sup> The extra funds over the coming years will pay for more Australian Defence Force officers to be deployed to Port Moresby, where they will work alongside their PNGDF counterparts as advisers and trainers at a time when the force plans on rapid expansion. The new emphasis on the defence relationship was underscored at the first bilateral defence ministers' meeting between the two countries in Canberra in December 2011, when they agreed on an annual PNG-Australia

---

<sup>29</sup> 'PNG Seeks Israeli Help on APEC Security', PINA, 18 October 2013, <<http://www.pina.com.fj/?p=pacnews&m=read&o=14478209285260b37842fcc2dc5c3b>> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

<sup>30</sup> 'Chinese Military Gives \$US2 Million Aid to Papua New Guinea', Sina English, 25 February 2013, <<http://english.sina.com/china/p/2013/0225/564946.html>> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

<sup>31</sup> 'Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Peter O'Neill Wants to Increase the Presence of the US Military in the Country', *Australian*, 15 April 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Sam Bateman, Anthony Bergin and Hayley Channer, *Terms of Engagement: Australia's Regional Defence Diplomacy* (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, July 2013), p. 55.

security dialogue involving senior defence and foreign affairs officials. PNG was represented at the inaugural South Pacific Defence Ministers' meeting in Tonga in 2013, and will host the 2014 meeting.

Asylum seekers complicate the PNG-Australia security relationship. The Asylum Seeker Processing Centre on Manus Island was built in 2001, closed in 2008, and then re-opened in November 2012 as the Australian Government sought to discourage the flow of potential refugees south from Indonesia. Australia announced on 19 July 2013 that henceforth all asylum seekers reaching Australian territory would be resettled in PNG or some other participating regional country. Under a bilateral Regional Resettlement Arrangement, PNG agreed—for an initial period of twelve months—to accept such people for processing, and if they proved to be refugees, to resettle them. Peter O'Neill wavered on this promise in 2014, suggesting that other Pacific countries should bear some of the burden of resettlement, but soon changed course and agreed that PNG would settle them all.<sup>33</sup> A major riot in the Manus processing centre in February 2014 left one asylum seeker dead, and pointed to major failures in management. The incident was emblematic of security problems in many parts of PNG: security was in the hands of a private security company, G4S, the PNG police lacked control over the situation, and the consequence was human rights abuse. As an Amnesty International Report of December 2013 pointed out, the regional resettlement arrangement has led to abuses of human rights while doing little for PNG:

Papua New Guinea has thus far seen no significant transfer of expertise or other material benefit from Australian immigration officials, medical staff, caseworkers, security staff, or other professionals. Papua New Guinea authorities remain dependent on their Australian counterparts for virtually every aspect of the administration and day-to-day operation of both the detention centre and the Refugee Status Determination process.<sup>34</sup>

Australia, while compensating PNG for hosting the processing centre, is undermining its own reputation for humanitarian treatment of potential refugees, and undercutting its advocacy of maintaining high standards in delivering security by disciplined forces in PNG.

## **The Developmental Roots of PNG's Security Problem**

The military mood in PNG is buoyant. Speaking at the officers' mess in Port Moresby in 2014, PNGDF chief of logistics Colonel Carl Wrakonei emphasised that PNG would be implementing the Defence White Paper and increasing the size of the force. He was quoted as saying that the PNGDF

---

<sup>33</sup> 'About-turn as PNG will Resettle Refugees and AFP Offers Help', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 April 2014.

<sup>34</sup> Amnesty International, *This is Breaking People: Human Rights Violations at Australia's Asylum Seeker Processing Centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea* (Sydney: Amnesty International Australia, 2013), p. 9.

would be more than 5,000 in strength by 2015 and 10,000 by 2030.<sup>35</sup> These are unrealistic predictions that belie the reality of the challenges facing the PNGDF. Indiscipline has been a problem in the past and remains so. In July 2013, after a minor argument between medical students and PNGDF personnel over access to an ATM, soldiers returned with bush knives and firearms to the University of Papua New Guinea medical faculty, where they fired on students and destroyed accommodation and property, including laptops and textbooks. Soldiers seriously injured one student.<sup>36</sup> A further incident followed in February 2014 near Merauke in the Indonesian province of Papua. A PNG military patrol intercepted an Indonesian fishing boat on its way to a village in PNG, stopped it at gunpoint and, after robbing the fishermen, left them to swim ashore while the boat was set alight. Five fishermen disappeared before reaching shore, and Jakarta reacted by sending more marines to Merauke together with a naval frigate to search for the men. Indonesia demanded an explanation from PNG.<sup>37</sup> The incident was almost certainly criminal rather than political in origin and therefore unlikely to disturb PNG- Indonesian relations, but it pointed to a persistent lack of discipline and *esprit de corps* in the PNGDF. Apart from anything else, the expanding PNGDF will need to focus on lines of authority and the responsible exercise of discipline.

A further qualification to this analysis is recognised by the Government of PNG itself, which issued the country's first National Security Statement alongside the new Defence White Paper. The National Security Statement ranked the security threats to PNG "in order of their imminence or likely occurrence and their seriousness when they do occur". Those threats identified as Level One, and therefore requiring "the highest state of preparedness, alertness and response" were, listed in order of importance,

untenable Law and Order; graft and corruption; human rights abuses and gender based violence; lack of border control; natural disasters and climate change; small arms and light weapons trafficking and proliferation; illegal poaching of resources; drug, alcohol and substance abuse; microbial attacks on plant, animal and human lives; and medical emergencies including HIV & AIDS, TB and Malaria.<sup>38</sup>

The list of threats and their order of priority points to the fundamentally developmental and political character of PNG's security problem, and the need for what the National Security Statement calls a whole-of-nation

---

<sup>35</sup> 'PNGDF—Fiji ties strong', *Post-Courier*, 7 April 2014.

<sup>36</sup> 'Armed Soldiers Assault UPNG Medical Students: Troops "Rampage" after Argument at Cash Machine', *PNG Post-Courier*, 15 July 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Scott Cheney-Peters, 'Troubled Waters: Indonesia's Growing Maritime Disputes: Indonesia Has Become Embroiled in Maritime Disputes with Neighbors like Singapore, Australia, and Papua New Guinea', *The Diplomat*, 19 February 2014, <<http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/troubled-waters-indonesias-growing-maritime-disputes>> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

<sup>38</sup> Government of PNG, *Defence White Paper 2013*, p. 20.

approach to address it. As the PNG Defence White Paper says, “PNG’s current and future security challenges are complex, non-traditional and predominantly developmental in nature”.<sup>39</sup> A bigger, better equipped and more tightly disciplined PNGDF would contribute to a security solution for PNG but only in certain areas such as border control, light weapons proliferation, security for major events and effective surveillance of the country’s EEZ. At the same time, participation in regional and global peacekeeping has the potential to enhance PNG’s international reputation. But as the Government of PNG recognises, much else is needed, including a better trained and equipped police force, and a rescue mission for the health system.

To discuss security in PNG, then, is to be driven back to a consideration of the political system in that country. PNG ranked 157th out of 187 countries in the 2014 UN Human Development Index, a rough but not grossly misleading guide to the state of development measured by life expectancy, education and GNI per capita.<sup>40</sup> PNG is a country where planning trumps implementation, and where statements of policy and white papers promise more than is delivered. The reasons for this situation have been canvassed on many occasions: PNG is linguistically diverse, its identities are fragmented, its geography poses difficulties for delivering services, it gained independence with only a small educated elite, its public administration is inefficient, and its culture has transformed the Westminster system inherited from Australia into something distinctively Melanesian, characterised by a particularist and kin-based understanding of political loyalties and an all-encompassing network of inescapable obligations. The consequence is that PNG parliaments are good at forming (and re-forming) the executive in a rough-and-tumble process of political deals, but much less effective in holding the government accountable and representing voters, that is to say, good at power but poor at doing something developmental with it.<sup>41</sup>

Australia’s aid to PNG under what foreign minister Julie Bishop calls the “new paradigm”, is likely to emphasise the empowerment of women. “Every time I visit PNG”, she told a business audience in Cairns in 2014,

I meet energetic, talented, creative women and girls—women in leadership positions, guiding their communities, advocating, acting as role models, getting things done—but we need more of them. Girls who want to learn but who need opportunities, and mentoring and more role models. I aim to work

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience*, Human Development Report 2014 (New York: UNDP, 2013), p. 174.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Morgan, *Cultures of Dominance: Institutional and Cultural Influences on Parliamentary Politics in Melanesia*, SSGM Discussion Paper 2005/2 (Canberra: ANU Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, 2005).



even more closely with PNG to help combat violence against women and girls so that they can make their contribution to the economy and society in a safe and secure environment—free from fear and free from violence and intimidation.<sup>42</sup>

The situation of many women in PNG—vulnerable and lacking opportunity—may be read as a metaphor for the society as a whole even though women are the ones who are most insecure. Security of life, property and territory is the foundation of a thriving economy and society, and PNG has never had enough of it. As the Government of PNG says, a whole-of-nation solution is required.

*Stewart Firth is a part-time Research Fellow at the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific. He was Professor of Politics at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, 1998-2004 and is the author of Australia in International Politics: An Introduction to Australian Foreign Policy, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Allen & Unwin, 2011). [stewart.firth@anu.edu.au](mailto:stewart.firth@anu.edu.au).*

---

<sup>42</sup> Julie Bishop, Speech, 30th Australia Papua New Guinea Business Forum and Trade Expo, Cairns, 19 May 2014, <[http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/Pages/2014/jb\\_sp\\_140519.aspx](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/Pages/2014/jb_sp_140519.aspx)> [Accessed 22 May 2014].