

# Recolonising the Solomon Islands

An analysis of the plan published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI). Their plan including giving Australian and New Zealand police and troops the right to kill, is now being implemented by the Howard Government.

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**Using the theory of “failed states”, a single country or a coalition of countries assumes the right to intervene in another sovereign country, to change its government by force, take over its economy and occupy it for an indefinite period. This policy violates the fundamental Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law. It is a completely unacceptable way of conducting world affairs that Western imperial powers, including Australia, are embarking upon to re-establish their authority over former colonies.**

It is what the US, Britain and Australia have done to Iraq. And this is what the Australian Government intends to do to the Solomon Islands and, subsequently, to Papua New Guinea and Bougainville.

The policy of “failed states” is explained and defended in a publication aptly entitled *Re-Ordering the World*. It was published in 2002 by The Foreign Policy Centre, a think-tank set up by British Prime Minister Tony Blair and former Foreign Minister Robin Cook. It contains articles from a number of prominent people with a forward from Tony Blair.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), in a report published in June 2003 and entitled *Our Failing Neighbour*, applies this policy to the Solomon Islands.

The ASPI was set up by the Australian Government and is financed by the Government out of the Defence Budget. At the same time, the Institute claims to be “independent and non-partisan”, a claim obviously made to mislead.

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The following are some quotes from *Re-Ordering the World*, which give a brief overview of the theory of “failing states”, which the ASPI document and Australian Government are applying to the Solomon Islands:

## **Re-Ordering the World**

“... because of the death of imperialism ... we are seeing the emergence of the pre-modern world. Empire and imperialism are words that have become terms of abuse in the post-modern world. Today, there are no colonial powers willing to take on the job, though the opportunities, perhaps even the need for colonisation is as great as it ever was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ... Weak government means disorder and that means falling investment. (Robert Cooper, adviser to Blair p.16)

“... there are now states – often former colonies – where in some sense the state has almost ceased to exist: a ‘pre-modern zone’ where the state has failed and a Hobbesian war of all against all is under way ....” (Robert Cooper p.12)

“The pre-modern world is a world of failed states... In such areas chaos is the norm and war is a way of life. Insofar as there is a government it operates in a way similar to an organised crime syndicate.

The pre-modern state may be too weak even to secure its home territory, let alone pose a threat internationally, but it can provide a base for non-state actors who may represent a danger to the postmodern world.... If they become too dangerous for established states to tolerate, it is possible to imagine a defensive imperialism.” (Robert Cooper pp.16-17)

“Power is the ability to effect the outcomes you want, and, if necessary, to change the behaviour of others to make this happen” (Joseph Nye, Harvard University p.2)

## **Deception, Double standards**

“The challenge to the postmodern world is to get used to the idea of double-standards. Among ourselves, we operate on the basis of laws and open co-operative security. But when dealing with more old-fashioned kinds of states outside the postmodern continent of Europe, we need to revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era – force, pre-emptive attack, deception, whatever is necessary to deal with those who still live in the 19<sup>th</sup> century world of ‘every state for itself’”. (Robert Cooper p.16)

“It is not just soldiers that come from the international community; it is police, judges, prison officers, central bankers and others. Elections are organised and monitored ... ”. (Robert Cooper p.18)

“Bringing order out of chaos is one of the great tasks of foreign policy for the new century.” (Jack Straw, British Foreign Secretary p.103)

“... national security is no longer national security in the simple conventional sense. ... the decisive difference about this global alliance is that its purpose is to *preserve internal*, rather than external, security. And with that, all the taken-for-granted distinctions that make up our standard picture of the modern state – the borders that divide domestic from international, the police from the military, crime from war and war from peace – are overthrown.” (Ulrich Beck, University of Munich p.114)

Beck, citing terrorism, says it is “necessary to redraw the political map of the world”. (p.113)

“The postmodern EU offers a vision of co-operative empire ... Like Rome, this commonwealth would provide its citizens with some of its laws, some coins and the occasional road.” (Robert Cooper p.19)

## **Methodology of new wars**

“Violations of humanitarian and human rights law are not a side-effect of war but the central methodology of new wars ... The strategy is to gain political power through sowing fear and hatred, to create a climate of terror, to eliminate moderate voices and to defeat tolerance ... Bosnians

will tell you ‘because we did not hate each other; we had to be taught to hate each other’’. (Mary Kaldor, London School of Economics p.22)

**Much of this thinking is reflected in the report and plan prepared by the ASPI to undertake a “preemptive strike” against the Solomon Islands and to take over and occupy this independent state.**

## **An incredible justification**

In what can only be regarded as an incredible justification for interference in the Solomon Islands the plans explains that “A little known clause in Australia’s Constitution assigns to the Federal Government responsibility for managing ‘The relations of the Commonwealth [of Australia] with the islands of the Pacific’”.

We are told that Edmund Barton who was Australia’s first Prime Minister following Federation in 1901 explained that “a very large number of people look forward with interest to the Commonwealth undertaking, as far as it can as part of the British Empire, the regulation of the Pacific Islands’. If that happened, he implied, Pacific Island affairs would not be external, but internal.

Of course this was all said before the Solomon Islands and other Pacific nations gained their independence from British (and Australian) colonialism and before the formation of the United Nations in which the Solomon Islands and other Pacific States are members with equal status to Australia, Britain, etc.

The ASPI report, while acknowledging the changes, none-the-less comments that “the clause in the Constitution remains, testifying to the permanence of Australia’s strategic interests in the pattern of islands that punctuate the approaches to our island continent”.

## “Our interests”

The report makes clear that its authors are not really concerned about the well-being of the people of the Solomon Islands. It sees the present situation as “a new challenge: how to promote **our interests** in these island territories ...”

And “**Our interests**, both current and contingent, are substantial”. It speaks of costs and risks that “are proportionate to and justified by the scale of **our national interests**.” ... “**Our** policy towards Solomon Islands must be designed with the aim of **servicing our national interests**”. (Emphasis added)

## Failing state

The ASPI plan immediately sets the scene by declaring that the “Solomon Islands, one of Australia’s nearest neighbours, is a failing state”.

The plan has two stages. The first is to restore “law and order” and estimates that this will require “a substantial police force of around 150 personnel drawn from donor countries, along with judicial and correctional personnel ... The police would be under the control of an ad hoc multilateral agency representing donor governments, and acting on behalf of the people of Solomon Islands. The same agency would take temporary control of government finances.”

We are told that the second phase “would focus on building Solomon Islands’ capacity for effective government, by helping to build new political structures and security institutions, and helping to address underlying social and economic problems.”

An article in the *Australian Financial Review* (June 11, 2003) summed up the plan succinctly. It wrote, “The blueprint envisages a governing council of about 12 led by a chief executive, with a light infantry company on standby, a judicial team of 20, prison staff, a group of accountants and other financial managers to administer the economy.”

Rather than a nation state with its own democratically elected government with a state administration, the plan would turn Solomon Islands into a corporation run on corporate lines with a chief executive appointed (not elected) by those controlling the purse-strings.

All that the existing Government of the Solomon Islands is called upon to do is to give its approval to what the Australian Government intends to do. It might then be permitted to exercise minimal jurisdiction while the appointed ad hoc committee exercises authority in the important areas of police, prisons, military, judiciary and finances. If it failed to bow to the demands of the interventionists and occupiers there would then be a case of “regime change”.

## **Others in line**

If it is imagined that this plan for the occupation and take-over of the Solomon Islands is a one-off strike the following will dispel that illusion. The report says, “What we decide to do about Solomon Islands will shape Australia’s overall approach to the problem of maintaining stability among the island states in our immediate neighbourhood ... Solomon Islands is a small country. If we cannot help there, it is doubtful that we can help any of our neighbours if and when they fall into serious trouble.” (ASPI p.7)

The authors of the plan are very concerned that they will be seen as attempting to re-establish a neo-colonialist regime. They write, “As a former colonial power and branch office of the British Empire, we have had to be careful to avoid any suggestion that we might be trying to reestablish an Australian imperium in the Southwest Pacific ... Our small neighbours ... have often been suspicious that Australia harbours imperial ambitions.” (ASPI p.8)

“Any policy approach to the problems of the Southwest Pacific must avoid the perils and mistakes of neocolonialism.” (ASPI p.9)

## **A scorpion remains a scorpion**

No matter how the authors of the plan twist and turn and attempt to cover their intentions a scorpion remains a scorpion. The reality is that the re-colonisation of Solomon Islands is exactly what the plan envisages.

The authors attempt to draw justification from the aggressive, pre-emptive interventions in other parts of the world citing Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and East Timor. It speaks of the “risks posed by rogue states like Iraq”

The document says that “the recent experience of the international community is that innovative policy solutions have been found in similar situations.”

The ASPI report goes on to sound a remarkably frank warning to all small sovereign states that fall under the avaricious gaze of the larger industrial powers. “Of course it is possible that Solomon Islands is simply not viable as an independent state. If this is the case, we have even bigger challenges, and we need to start thinking what we should do about them”. (ASPI p.11)

By referring back to the statement of Edmund Barton one can envisage a course that would absorb the Solomon Islands into the Commonwealth of Australia to become an “internal” issue.

In justification for its interventionist policies the ASPI identifies the usual, current dangers and fears – drug smuggling, gun-running, criminal elements taking over, terrorism, Australia’s long-term security and, most of all, the fear that some other state might come to the aid of Solomon Islands.

It claims that the “violence in Solomon Islands has been nurtured in part by the example of disturbances elsewhere in the South West Pacific and refers specifically to Bougainville.

### **“Poison”**

A *Financial Review* editorial (June 12, 2003) writing on the ASPI plan says, “The poison leaching out from the Bougainville civil war, which

began 15 years ago, infected both Papua New Guinea – now in deep economic depression – and the Solomon Islands.”

The “poison” being referred to is the struggle of the Bougainvillean people for independence, their armed struggle to gain their independence and their act of shutting down Rio Tinto’s Panguna copper mine. This is indeed “poison” viewed from the point of view of the rapacious transnational corporations.

## **Business and investment opportunities**

The objectives of the ASPI report and the Australian Government are made clear: “Despite its poverty, there is wealth in Solomon Islands for those with the will to extract it: gold, timber and fish. If the state cannot provide security and a legal framework in which such extraction can occur, others will. And their methods will be far from attractive.”

We are told that “The collapse of Solomon Islands is depriving Australia of business and investment opportunities...” (ASPI pp.13-14)

Of course the examples of environmental and social catastrophe brought about by the exploitation by the BHP at Ok Tedi gold mine in Papua New Guinea and Rio Tinto’s experience at the Panguna copper mine in Bougainville are not mentioned.

However, the real reasons behind the present economic breakdown are clearly revealed in the trade figures published in the ASPI report. There is a staggering imbalance in the trade between Australia and Solomon Islands. In 2001-02 Australia’s exports to Solomon Islands amounted to \$62 million while imports stood at only \$2 million. In 1997-98 exports stood at \$101 million and imports at only \$5 million.

This has created a huge balance of payments deficit for the Solomon Islands government that cannot be overcome unless and until Australia changes its unfair trade policies. It is more likely, however, that the

Australian Government has in mind the seizure of the resources of the Solomon Islands and by that means to pay-off these trade debts.

The ASPI report does not draw any conclusions from these figures or even suggest that Australia's unfair trade is likely to have contributed substantially to the financial difficulties now faced by Solomon Islands.

Again, in a further attempt to justify its neo-colonialist intentions and in an admission of its own responsibility for the current situation, the report says: "In a subtle but important sense, state failure in the Southwest Pacific reflects badly on Australia."

## **Screwing up courage**

But to screw up its courage to take pre-emptive and forceful action it goes on: "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 p.14-15). Note this servile attitude to the United States.

How Australia's preemptive strike and its colonization of the Solomon Islands will be seen among Third World countries is apparently of no concern so long as the big industrial powers, particularly the US, support and applaud Australia.

And again, indicating its discomfort the report admits that "Australians themselves may also start to feel uncomfortable if democratic institutions collapse in a region in which we tend to see ourselves as the primary representative of the international community." (ASPI p.15)

## **International community**

One must ask who and is being referred to as the "international community". Is it the overwhelming number of countries that make up

the Third World who find themselves in a similar position to that of Solomon Islands, or is it the minority of the big and industrially developed countries that are regarded as Australia's "major allies and friends"?

"The collapse of effective government in Solomon Islands undermines our ability to protect [our] vital long-term strategic interests" from "unwelcome forces". The Solomon Islands may become "vulnerable to external influences" (ASPI p.16).

We are told that "This may involve such schemes as dumping toxic waste". What the report ignores, however, is that it was a United States company that in 1991 attempted to foist a proposal for the Solomon Islands to allow itself to become a toxic waste dump. In subsequent years more than 20 similar proposals have been put to the Solomon Islands Government according to *The World Guide 2000*. (published by Instituto del Tercer Mundo English edition.) Were any of these proposals made by Australian, French or British companies?

## **Passing the blame**

Pointing the finger indirectly at the United Nations and its policy of decolonisation, the reason for the existence of so-called "failed states" is attributed to "The rush to independence on a timetable dictated from afar, resulting in poorly designed institutions of statehood." (ASPI p.18)

If there are failings in this regard the responsibility rests squarely with the former colonial powers, in the case of the Solomon Islands, Britain and Australia.

However, this does not prevent the ASPI from whitewashing the former colonial powers. We are told that the "Solomon Islands were colonised somewhat reluctantly by Britain in the late nineteenth century for reasons that are familiar to us today. At Australia's urging, London moved into Solomon Islands to curtail what we would now call transnational crime, especially blackbirding and to ensure that no other imperial power established a presence there." (ASPI p.19)

Of course, it was Australia that committed the “transnational crime”. Queensland cane farmers were the main recipients of the “blackbirding” of Solomon Islanders. And the other imperial power whose presence was to be kept out was Germany.

The authors of the ASPI report are not without their fair share of hypocrisy!

After listing the various “aid” projects foisted on Solomon Island Governments, they bemoan the fact that “the introduced institutions of the modern nation-state have been overlaid on top of a multiplicity of indigenous political structures. The latter have proven to be remarkably adaptable and their resilience in the face of colonial and post-colonial transformations provides the broader basis for the continuing weakness of the state.” (ASPI p.27)

Successive colonialist administrations, including those from Australia who continue to trumpet their “generosity”, have attempted to foist their institutions onto other states without any attempt to take into account the centuries old customs and structures that have been built up by the Indigenous people.

It is yet another reflection of the fact that the colonialists think that their methods and structures are the only ones to be considered and that they are “modern” and “civilised” while all others are “uncivilised” and “out of date”. Such people qualify for the name given to them by Michael Moore – Stupid White Men!

They may be stupid but they are not short of arrogance and contempt for others and are willing to commit any crime to achieve their control, the power over others and their aggrandizement from the labour and wealth of weaker states. Can they be called civilized or is it they who remain the real barbarians?

Having failed to impose its “civilisation” through “aid” the Australian Government now intends to impose its form of government and economy by force.

## **Yugoslavia**

Once again the report attempts to justify its policy of intervention by reference to Yugoslavia. It says, “The collapse of Yugoslavia made Western Europe realise that the destabilising effects of a civil war could bleed into the broader region ... And European states among others are having to rebuild Bosnia and Kosovo”. (ASPI p.29)

This presentation is nothing short of a lie. Yugoslavia was broken up by the deliberate promotion of ethnic and civil strife in the former multi-ethnic but united state of Yugoslavia. Separatists were supported, armed and financed from outside specifically by Germany, Britain, France and the United States in particular.

Although Kosovo is presented as though it is an independent state it remains a province of Serbia-Montenegro. The Kosovo People’s Liberation Army was a fascist organisation financed and armed by the United States (and strongly supported by the Australian Government at the time).

It is this sort of dishonesty that underlies the whole theory of “failed states” which is nothing more than the ideological justification for the re-imposition of colonial regimes.

## **Sovereignty**

“There is a growing recognition of the need to intervene in failing and failed states”, says the ASPI report. (ASPI p. 29)

It goes on: “While the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention are still the cornerstones of the international system, there has been a change in the concept of sovereignty, and a growing body of thinking about the place of intervention within the international system”. (ASPI p.29)

This double-speak actually means that “intervention” now over-rides “sovereignty”. Reference to “sovereignty” is nothing more than dishonest lip service. In this case the reference to the “international system” is one that the US and its few allies are attempting to impose on the wider world.

The logical conclusion from this dishonesty is as stated: “We need ... to be willing to take preventive action where appropriate.” (ASPI p.31).

However, the problems that this policy of pre-emptive strike raises makes the ASPI cautious.

The report maintains that “Interventions require a multilateral presence with broad-based international or regional support ... [while] state building need not be neo-colonialism”. (Ibid.p30). So far, it seems, the authors have not come up with another name for what is obviously neo-colonialism. That is how the people of Solomon Islands will come to regard it as the reality of big power domination unfolds. This is how things are already being seen in Afghanistan and Iraq where opposition to occupation and oppression by foreign powers (not liberation) is already spreading rapidly.

The ASPI plans says that “... it should **if at all possible** involve the consent of the affected state” (Emphasis added. ASPI p.30). Presumably, if consent is not “possible” the use of force will prevail.

## **Australia’s selected collaborators**

So far Sir Peter Kenilorea, the speaker of the Solomon Island parliament, Sir John Ini Lapli the Governor-General and Sir Allan Kemakeza the Prime Minister have come to the party. They have given Australia and its allies a cover by which to mislead the Australian and international public that an “invitation” has been obtained.

Sir Peter Kenilorea writes, “Hence my expressed support for a direct executive/supervisory involvement by Australia or any of our development partners in every area of national reconstruction, including an Australian-led International Peacekeepers party”.

The ASPI planners have already given the “ad hoc multinational agency” that is to run Solomon Islands a name. It is to be called the Solomon Islands Rehabilitation Authority (SIRA). (ASPI p.39)

And the work of this agency has been divided up into convenient headings. At the top of the list is “**Police**”.

We are told that “The central requirement is for active, sustained and muscular policing ... It will need to impose a policy of zero tolerance for violence and intimidation [except for its own violence and intimidation] **and be prepared and willing to use significant force, including lethal force, to do so.**” (ASPI p.41) (Emphasis added)

Other headings cover “**Military**” — with a light infantry company standing by.

The “**Judicial machinery**” is “to process and punish those found guilty of offences.”

The agency is going to establish “**Correctional services**”. We are told that the “Solomon Islands has a very inadequate prison system”.

Then there are “**Legal and constitutional issues**” which are to underpin the operations of the agency. The authors write: “The police and other elements of the stabilisation program must be answerable to authorities that will not be subject to local pressure and intimidation”. This obviously means that the agencies to be set up will be answerable to Australia and other powers that might be associated with this neo-colonialist adventure.

Last, but not least the plan envisages that it will be necessary “**to establish a team to take over the management of Solomon Island’s finances to stop them being siphoned off improperly.**” (ASPI p.43)

One can be sure that finances siphoned off by foreign corporations such as Rio Tinto, Gold Ridge Mine, etc will be regarded as “proper”.

In support of this supposition the plan suggests that auditing and ombudsman functions “may be better provided from an overseas source than to try and establish a viable local capability.” (ASPI p.45) The

Solomon Islands Government “could ‘contract out’ important functions of government such as treasury and finance functions.”

Together with this elaborate plan of intervention is a detailed costing of such an intervention. Indicating its long-term intention, the ASPI estimates expenditure at \$78 million per annum for the first two years and \$75 million per annum thereafter. How long the “thereafter” is to be is not stated. But US troops have already stayed in South Korea and Japan for more than 50 years and in some other countries for even longer.

The reporters suggest that Australia should pay about half of the estimated cost of \$853 million over a decade. Who is to pay the rest remains a mystery.

“The Solomon Islands Rehabilitation Authority would be an ad hoc multinational agency established jointly by a group of interested countries and international organisation who are committed to supporting the rehabilitation of Solomon Islands.” (ASPI p.48).

Will Islanders be expected to fund this through their own resources as they are plundered by foreign transnational corporations, just as the Iraqi’s are now being told to pay for their reconstruction from oil income rather than by those nations that have brought death and destruction to Iraq?

After canvassing the UN Security Council and ASEAN as possible participants ASPI settles on a more realistic group from the Australian point of view. “At this stage we would suggest simply that a group of interested countries and regional organisations be brought together to form a governing body for the SIRA” (ASPI p.49).

Once again indicating the sensitivity of the whole project the planners assert: “It would be critical for the credibility of the whole project that Australia did not seek to dominate the governing body, nor to monopolise key positions on the SIRA. Indeed we think it would be best for the SR (Senior Representative) not to be an Australian, partly for that reason”. (ASPI p.50).

So, the hope is that others will become front-runners to get their hands dirty and to hide the fact that behind it all are Australian interests and objectives.

New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Vanuatu, Britain, France, Japan, Canada, the European Union and the Pacific Island Forum are on the list of possible participants. Even South Korea, Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries get a mention.

Despite this attempt to hide its role the planners, apparently in a flash of honesty, say that “We would need to be confident that Australia is prepared to undertake the costs and risks involved in accepting **the leading role in developing, promoting and implementing the plan**”. (ASPI p.52). (Emphasis added)

Of course, there is the very real problem of obtaining Solomon Island “consent”. Even this problem is tackled by the planners, however. They say, “The act of consent might come either from the Solomon Islands Government or perhaps from some other highly credible group recognised as expressing a broadly based consensus among Solomon Islanders that they would welcome the SIRA and the role it is intended to play”. (Ibid p52).

It may be possible to bribe or threaten other credible persons in addition to those already mentioned. However, it is as well to recognise that the US has not been able to form even an interim regime in Iraq although it had organised and trained its own band of collaborators for many years in advance of its invasion this year.

The rejection of colonialism and the demand for independence and sovereignty remain strong in the world and this neo-colonialist plan outlined on behalf of the Australian Government may yet come crashing down – as it deserves.

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