



Solomon Islands Police Perceptions of Australian and New Zealand Policing Assistance

Casandra Harry

The University of Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago

Abstract

Police reform is a critical component of peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and reintroducing stability in countries emerging from conflict. The assumption is that without a secure environment and a security system, sustained peace, political, economic, and cultural rebuilding is impossible. Ethnic conflict in the Solomon Islands between 1998–2003 resulted in reform of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), carried out by the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). This institutional reconfiguration has been presented by the Solomon Islands government and RAMSI as a success and the gold standard for reforms in the Pacific. Despite this, internal stakeholder perspectives on the effectiveness and appropriateness of post-conflict institutional reform are absent. This work analyses and explores reflections and experiences of reform held by RSIPF officers at the mission's culmination. It interrogates critical reflections on the changes during reform, examines key concerns and drawbacks, and advances literature on post-conflict scholarship.

Keywords: Solomon Islands; international interventions; police force building; police reform; post-conflict police reform.

Introduction

Examining the perspectives and feedback from individuals within the organisation is critical in identifying and addressing shortcomings with the design and operation of reform projects and programmes. Inclusion of perspectives from stakeholders inside of the organisation is also instructive for ensuring that future programme strategies are both useful and valid. The lack of significant internal perspectives on the relevance and impact of reform stymies critical reflection on reform efforts and diminishes the sustainability of implemented reform processes. Internal stakeholder perspectives provide nuanced outlooks, which can significantly influence future actions. By incorporating the viewpoints of those directly involved, these perspectives can inform a bottom-up understanding of complex interactions and situations, contrasting with imposing a top-down approach.

In countries emerging from armed conflict, there are visible state-building and reform efforts in agencies within the security sector, and reform in police organisations is often seen as the most needed (Divon, 2017). Police reform is therefore viewed as a necessity for effective post-conflict peacebuilding, leading to a proliferation in focus and research on police reform in countries exiting war and conflict (Bayley 2008; Celador 2005; den Heyer 2010; Divon 2017; Loh 2010). However, despite this reality, and the substantial investment of resources into reform-focused initiatives, there remains a risk that reform efforts may yield strained and volatile results (Murray 2007). This realisation has seen policymakers and reformers actively seeking prescriptions for overcoming the challenges of implementing and sustaining police reform in unstable environments (Loh 2010).



It could be argued that a notable shortcoming of these efforts stems from undiversified reform strategies and lack of feedback and critique mechanisms. In many instances, reform updates and reports prepared and published by donor agencies contain little input from local actors and present the outcomes largely in a positive light only. McInnes et al. (2012) noted that while academic scholarship presents a cornucopia of stakeholder studies, there was a preoccupation on investigating the perceptions of stakeholders outside of the organisation under study, with scant focus given to examining the perceptions of individuals within the organisation.

In the Solomon Islands, the intervention and post-conflict police reform implemented by the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI)¹'s Participating Police Force (PPF) has been commended for the successful transformation of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). The transformation of the force has also been presented by the Solomon Islands government and RAMSI officials as the gold standard for police reform in the Pacific region. This initiative presents an appropriate backdrop for examining post-conflict donor-led police reform from the perspectives of internal stakeholders, namely local RSIPF officers.

Literature Review

While all actors in the security sector are critical for peace and security, contemporary societies prioritise police involvement in post-conflict stability processes, emphasising the critical need for ongoing reform within this institution (den Heyer 2010; Kakachia and O'Shea 2012). Neild (2006) advanced that since the 1990s, police reform has emerged as an appurtenant component of peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Country cases of post-conflict police reform can be found in East Timor, Haiti, former Yugoslavia, Kosovo, and Guatemala. This has arisen because in many instances of civil unrest and conflict, police officers have been key contributors to internal instability, often having themselves participated in human rights violations (Bayley 2008; den Heyer 2010; Neild 2006). As a result, much of the literature supports the belief that police reform is paramount in providing security and re-establishing the political process.

Despite the importance of police reform, for many countries emerging from armed conflict and unrest (particularly those in the Global South), the scale of security sector reconfiguration necessary to rebuild the nation often exceeds their financial and budgetary capacity. This results in intervention assistance being funded and implemented by donor countries and agencies (Ansorg 2017; Divon 2017; Donais 2009b; Rauch and Van der Spuy 2006). In these circumstances, donors may be tempted to extend their responsibilities beyond logistical and financial obligations to include oversight and leadership of the reform process. According to Mobekk (2010a), Ansorg (2017), Donais (2009b), and Rauch and Van der Spuy (2006), although it is often argued that locals lack the necessary knowledge and expertise to contribute effectively to post-conflict reform, it is more often donor countries and organisations that take the lead in reform efforts because of their funding role in security sector reconfiguration. This can render reform supply-driven instead of demand-led.

Kocak (2018) and Pino and Ellison (2012) identified that in many post-conflict settings, reform efforts have often melded security and development agendas, thereby prioritising the national security interests of donor nations and organisations. Meiske and Ruggeri (2017) and Neack (1995) added that states' involvement in peacekeeping operations is shaped by their security and foreign policies, and significantly rooted in idealistic practices or state interest. In these types of arrangements, donor states seek to implement systems of policing and policing strategies based on methods successfully implemented abroad, specifically in Western contexts (Harry and Watson 2022; Pino and Ellison 2012). The error inherent in this assumption of suitability has been highlighted by numerous authors, including Morgan, Murphy, and Horwitz (2017); Pino and Ellison (2012); Divon (2017); Goldsmith and Dinnen (2007); and Harry and Watson (2022). These authors found that the one-size-fits-all approach, resulting in large-scale transplantation of external measures, was often ill-suited to local contexts due to their unique culture, history, politics, and legal norms.

Krause and Jütersonke (2005), Law (2006), Matsuzawa (2016), and Donais (2009a) further identified that numerous post-conflict countries had been compelled to adopt models and standards of donor-driven policies dictated by foreign reform experts, impacting reform acceptance, ownership, and sustainability. Various authors, including Africa (2008) and Caparini (2010), contended that irrespective of the conditions that precipitated reform, local ownership of reform procedures and processes was critical in ensuring that reform initiatives directly reflected the security and justice needs of all citizens. Unfortunately, they noted that on many occasions, this was not the case. Mobekk (2010b) and Hendrickson and Jolliffe (2018) added further, that for reform to take root, and be suitable and legitimate, the diverse layers of local ownership and the various interests existent within the society, including those within the institution being reformed, must be identified.

Despite the frequency and importance of post-conflict police reform, there has been scant academic attention placed on examining the dynamics of transfer from the perspectives of local police organisations (Brogden and Nijhar 2013; Chesterman

2007; Pino and Wiatrowski 2006; Van der Spuy 2000). Duffey (2000) and Tomforde (2010) argued that technical skills were not the only transfer made during reform. These scholars suggested that there was also an informal transfer of norms and cultures. These tended to infiltrate local organisations and could have a dominating impact over local operations. However, little attention has been paid to examining this potential.

It is becoming clear that several pertinent factors influence perceptions of the acceptance and success of reforms in the post-conflict context. In this article I present nuanced positions, exploring the perceptions and experiences of RSIPF officers at the culmination of the mission, and highlight and interrogate these critical reflections on concerns and drawbacks of reform. In this regard, it discusses the shared belief that decreased training time for new recruits and RSIPF's assimilation of foreign policing styles and practices resulted in a reduction in the force's standard of discipline. Officers' reflective positions on the force's lack of independence due to the lingering presence and involvement of donor agents within the force are also explored in this work.

Methods

This article draws on data collected from a broader study of officers' perceptions of policing and police reform in the RSIPF (Harry 2021). The study employed a phenomenological approach to examine, interpret and present the officers' experiences and critical perspectives on RSIPF reform in the Solomon Islands. It explored themes related to officers' perceptions of the impact of institutional reform on their personal and cultural values, the appropriateness of state policing practices and mandates, and their level of engagement with the public before and after reform. Out of these broad themes, the officers' perceptions of RAMSI-led reform at the end of the mission were revealed. This article specifically focuses on these officers' experiences and thoughts of institutional reform in force at the end of the mission.

Data collection was carried out at RSIPF headquarters and various police posts in Honiara, Solomon Islands. Face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 active RSIPF officers. Respondents included four female officers and 14 male officers. This sample was reflective of the male to female officer ratio within the RSIPF (Royal Solomon Islands Police Force 2019). Officers possessed service lengths in the force ranging from 15 to 35 years and occupied ranks from Inspector to Deputy Commissioner of Police. These officers formed part of the RSIPF throughout the reform process. Participants originated from eight of the nine provinces in the Solomon Islands.

Written consent was received from participating officers and during the interview respondents were provided with the option of responding to questions in the main language spoken in Solomon Islands (Pidgin). However, all officers expressed a preference to communicate in English. The interview asked questions related to officers' perceptions of organisational transformation; the impact of institutional reform on their personal and cultural values; the appropriateness of state policing practices; and officers' perception of reform at the inception, during, and at the end of reform. To ensure anonymity, respondents' names were replaced with code names, for example, **RSIPF officer#1**. Officers were required to sign a consent form allowing use of their responses in disseminated documents.

Data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), as prescribed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). Abstraction was used to identify patterns between emergent themes and to develop 'superordinate' or 'master' themes. Similar themes were placed together and a new name was developed for each cluster. Using NVivo, these sections of data were sorted, and paragraphs with similar thoughts and experiences were placed into codes/nodes that were created and labelled as they emerged from the transcripts. In this article, the 'superordinate' themes identified were: (1) Adverse aspects of institutional development — a decline in the standard of discipline and (2) Insights into the independence of the RSIPF. The following section examines officers' critical positions on institutional reconfiguration at the end of the mission. Additionally, as is common in the IPA approach, this section reflects the double hermeneutic, revealing objective understandings of the research participants' interpretations of their subjective experiences and perceptions of post-conflict reform in the RSIPF. The following section examines officers' critical perceptions on institutional reconfiguration.

Discussion of Findings

Findings are presented under two broad headings: (1) *Adverse aspects of institutional development — A decline in the standard of discipline*. (2) *Insights into the independence of the RSIPF*. One hundred percent of respondents identified that donor-led police reform in the RSIPF helped officers to develop critical policing skills, helped develop the force, and brought about a return of public confidence in the police. However, it was revealed that RSIPF officers believed that reform had both negatively and positively affected the local force. Sixty-seven percent of interviewees believed that reform had led to a decrease in the standard of discipline within the force. Moreover, 80 percent of the officers believed that the RSIPF lacked independence, due to the intervening forces' lingering presence. I turn now to analysing these findings.

Finding 1: Adverse Aspects of Institutional Development — A Decline in the Standard of Discipline

A major point of concern identified by the officers was based upon their perception of a decline in discipline within the force. Respondents believed that although officers gained new knowledge in policing and become more competent in carrying out their duties, there was a significant decrease in the standard of police discipline compared to before the institutional reconfiguration. Data for this finding are presented under two themes. The first is 1.1 *Shortening of the training time and the decline in discipline*, which presents participants' perceived link between shortened recruit training and the decreased discipline within the force. The second theme is 1.2 *Cultural assimilation and the decline in discipline* and presents officers' views of how the reformers' cultural norms and policing practices influenced the RSIPF.

Theme 1.1: Shortening of the Training Time and the Decline in Discipline

The duration and content of training programmes to which new employees are exposed play critical roles in their contextual learning and job success (Kleygrewe et al. 2022; Liao, Zhou and Yin 2022). It is during this period that trainees learn both organisational policies and operations, and unwritten institutional standards of best practice. Data from the in-depth interviews found that officers believed the decline in the standard of discipline within the force was linked to the decrease in training time implemented by RAMSI. Officers' perspectives on the impact of changes in the training policy are identified below:

RSIPF officer#13 believed:

RAMSI came in and turn hands with RSIPF, their exit really developed our country and RSIPF. But in this organisation, we lost some of our procedures in terms of policing. When RAMSI came, they got rid of some rules and regulations. For example, recruit training was eight solid months for one recruit course. When RAMSI came, they only run three months for a course. That is not enough to pick up the full content of the training, which police conduct.

This officer made known that RAMSI-led reform had a positive effect on transforming and developing the local force. However, they also reflected on operations within the organisation and compared past policing procedures and practices with those existing post-reform. This respondent referred to the shorter recruitment training, making a link between this shortened time and the perception that new officers were unable to operate effectively as police.

RSIPF officer#1 noted:

I want to explain here in the police, it's six month[s], then you're on practice for two years, then you'll be mature in the level of understanding of what you learn. When RAMSI come in, they reduced that to three, it affects policing. I see the only way to address this is change three to six months, improve the discipline. To understand policing in the context of Melanesia, they should regain six months training, instead of less than three months.

This officer also presented a desire to increase police training from three months to the initial six months. The respondent also linked the maturity and understanding of new officers to be capable police officers in the Melanesian context to the length of training.

RSIPF officer#6 believed:

Before RAMSI, police recruits, it's six to seven months, seven months actually. When they arrive, it's three months. One of the priorities should be to review and extend the capability of the police academy, because the training time affects discipline. It should not be three months but six months to a year.

This respondent also noted the decrease in training time for new recruits upon the mission's arrival. **RSIPF officer#6**, like their colleagues **RSIPF officer#13** and **RSIPF officer#1**, believed that the decrease in training to three months inadvertently affected the level of discipline. While officers recalled differing training lengths for past recruits, a key thread throughout the data was the belief that training time should extend beyond three months.

Policing is a complex process. For this reason, it is useful for agencies involved in law enforcement to adequately train new recruits to prepare them effectively for their roles as police officers (Blumberg et al. 2019; Karp and Stenmark 2011). While scholarly literature presented limited evidence that longer periods of police training provide increased benefits, various authors, including Council on Criminal Justice (2021), Bluestone et al. (2013), and Bezrukova et al. (2016), have highlighted that, generally, longer training lengths yielded greater job performance. In the case of the Solomon Islands, both post-conflict intervention and weeding out compromised officers from the RSIPF saw the force facing significant manpower shortages. To quickly fill this gap, training time for new recruits was decreased (Royal Solomon Islands Police Force n.d.). Taken together,

it is clear that the interviewed officers shared a belief this reduction in training time for new recruits resulted in decreased adherence to institutional procedures, which contributed to new officers' inability to fully understand and reflect the policing culture, techniques, and standards expected for policing in the Solomon Islands.

The positions expressed by the officers on the importance of revisiting training length give credence to the work of scholars who have extensively researched this aspect, including Conti and Nolan III (2005), Karp and Stenmark (2011), Quah (2006), and Wood and Tong (2009). These scholars highlight that careful consideration of the length of training periods is important, since new officers need sufficient time to be introduced to and accept prevailing organisational culture, principles, and standards. Their research indicates that this educational experience and socialisation contribute to organisational cultural coherence and continuity. As the respondents' comments reveal, other officers view it as the basis for operational culture and police action, affecting workplace acceptance.

Theme 1.2: Cultural Assimilation and the Decline in Discipline

Respondents believed that discipline issues within the force could also be attributed to assimilation of foreign policing norms and standards. Respondents identified that while standards within the local force required and enforced dressing in full uniform on active duty, the presence of and influence from Australian and New Zealand PPF officials negatively impacted this position. Officers informed that the presence and engagement with mission officials resulted in changes in policing culture, general appearance, and approach to work. Officers frequently noted how engaging with mission officials changed local policing culture, which itself was inherited from and shaped by colonialism. The respondents saw evidence for changes happening to the former ways of doing police work in the different conduct and less appropriately attired appearance of newer officers. I identify and elaborate on these views next.

RSIPF officer#13 believed:

In terms of discipline, during our time, before RAMSI influence, discipline was a paramount thing in the organisation. You report to work timely, no absenteeism, you need to provide a sick leave before you absent from work or if you reported sick, you need to provide sick leave. No chewing betel nut in police uniform, etc.

This officer highlighted the perceived deficiency in discipline caused by the presence of and engagement with RAMSI officials. This respondent believed that 'in terms of discipline, in our time before RAMSI influence, discipline was a paramount thing in the organisation'. In comparing present day to *our time*, this officer expressed nostalgia over perceived past strength and discipline within the force. They conveyed concern over perceived decreased importance of organisational discipline and officers' lax approaches to traditionally frowned upon policing practices. They attributed this decline to the influence of RAMSI officials, citing unpunctuality, absenteeism, and chewing betel nut while in uniform as concerns. However, this nostalgia-laden perception must be balanced with the reality that the mission's intervention was aimed at supporting and restoring the local force from institutional weaknesses experienced during the ethnic conflict (Allen and Dinnen 2016; Dinnen 2012).

Furthermore, **RSIPF officer#12** described:

We have very basic standards, every single thing within the police force runs very clear. For example, with the men, you must cut your—sideburns, you must shave. This sort of thing, they've standards. When my counterparts came in, they have different standards. They don't shave, their haircuts are different. That affects the way our officers do things, they thought that's okay. We continue to remind them; the reason why we remind them of basic things like that is because when you do that, you enforce discipline. Look, chewing betel nut or smoking with uniforms, in the past, you are not allowed to do those things [in] public places in police uniform. That's a no-no for us. If you want to smoke, you must go and hide and smoke. When they see our counterpart smoking in public places, it gradually gets embedded in the system.

This respondent referred to set standards of appropriate appearance within the RSIPF, like acceptable haircuts and shaving. The officer expressed concern over how mission officers' dress code and physical appearance had infiltrated the RSIPF and underscored the reform's impact on officers' attitudes towards work and respect for the uniform. Their discontent with the normalisation of foreign behaviours and attitudes included comparing current day police behaviours to those in existence before reform. Repetition of the view that officers needed to be reminded of local organisational practices and standards over newly introduced ones highlighted the officer's unfavourable view towards newly embedded foreign standards, and preference for a return to the old approaches.

RSIPF officer#18 recalled:

The organisation previously was well discipline[d]. [Now] our officers are very complacent, are very reluctant to follow orders [and] instructions. A lot of discipline issues. In the past our police officers wear sharp uniforms, polished shoes, they live up to the dress code. [Now] that's a bit [low]. They [*sic*] Australian and New Zealand officers have their style, and we have our own style, but somehow as we go along, they start to integrate to each other. To be honest, in terms of discipline, I reckon some of the young fellows that's breed into during the RAMSI adopted their style of policing, not the Solomon style of doing it. The difference is, for an example, our police officers, in terms of dress code, you must wear full uniforms when you go to the street, but some of these fellas don't worry about the cap. They just walk into the street and in a shop, etc. In terms of policing here, you must fully observe the dress code, the standard, deportment, and all of these. Those are some of the disadvantages there, some of the things they learned during that time.

This interview respondent also commented on how engaging with mission officials influenced local officers on organisational discipline. Like **RSIPF officer#12**, this officer compared the lack of professionalism within the current force with the level that existed before reform, highlighting their perception of organisational regression. Moreover, this respondent claimed that the necessary level of professionalism and devotion had not yet been achieved by younger officers. This declaration, along with the preceding position that officers in the past displayed respect and esteem for their profession through their uniforms, revealed a comparison between two generations of officers, finding the contemporary force lacking in this regard.

Similar to **RSIPF officer#12**, this interviewee attributed this occurrence directly to the influence of foreign counterparts, their style, and principles introduced and assimilated within the local force. This portrayal represented an observation of the contrasting policing styles held by the two forces. This officer's narrative expressed an antagonistic view towards the adoption of the Australian/New Zealand style, conveying the respondent's preference for the local or *Solomon style* of police conduct, including the view that this local standard of policing, deportment, and dress was superior and more culturally apt. This position might also be understood as reflecting legacies of the British (colonial) style of policing the Solomon Islands inherited at independence.

RSIPF officer#11 conveyed that:

I think reform brings some advantages and drawbacks to the organisation. Because before reform we have strong discipline organisation, there's a lot of respect. Before the police was like military type, very strong discipline, but when we go into these reforms, it's like the discipline is lacking. Like [for] example, wearing of uniform, before when you go to the street you have to wear a full set of uniforms, not wearing half uniform, wearing hats. Now people chew betel nut and smoke in the uniform. That's why I say that these things come with reform. This modern type of policing, that's where people observed us and it's like we are undisciplined.

RSIPF officer#11 identified a belief that before reform, the force demonstrated a high degree of discipline, akin to the strong levels observed in the military. This respondent highlighted key areas affected by the presence and influence of the reformers, leading to the perception of the RSIPF as *undisciplined* by both officers and the public.

The narratives above revealed the officers' appreciation for reform, alongside their concern over its impact on organisational discipline. Taken together, it is clear the respondents felt anxious and uneasy about changes to the standard of dress code and officer appearance. State police practices in many Pacific countries, including the Solomon Islands, reflect a militaristic style originally adopted from their British colonial pasts (Dinnen 2019). Donor positions and influences are often premised upon intentional and unintentional transfer of largely Western ideals of what is 'acceptable' and 'modern', imposed or diffused without clear consideration of the appropriateness or implications of their impacts on local settings (Allen and Dinnen 2016; Harry, Watson and Nanau 2023; Watson and Dinnen 2020).

Despite long-term justice and policing assistance from Australia and New Zealand as leading regional donors, the officers' discussed perspectives highlight negativity towards the introduction and adaptation of foreign dress standards into the RSIPF. Officers expressed a preference for the existing dress code, reflecting a deeply ingrained belief in the importance of the pre-mission approaches towards police appearance. Johnson (2017) noted that a well-presented uniform worn by police officers holds psychological significance for the public, as it conveys a sense of power, discipline and authority. Johnson further suggested that even slight changes to the uniform's style or appearance could alter how citizens perceived each officer's and the force's authority. For these officers, the police uniform is not solely a symbol of authority for the officer wearing it but also reflects an established representation of organisational strength and discipline.

Finding 2: Insights into the Independence of the RSIPF

At the end of reform, the RSIPF officers reflected upon their organisation's independence. The eventual drawdown of the mission signalled a formal end to RAMSI's mandate, which had guided reform processes in the RSIPF. Although the mission officially departed, its influence within the RSIPF continued under two distinct programmes: firstly, the Solomon Islands Police Support Program (SIPSP) for the RSIPF, spearheaded and financed by the New Zealand government; and secondly, the Solomon Islands Police Development Program (SIPDP), supported by the Australian government (Australian Federal Police 2016). The SIPDP's role was to continue RAMSI's drawdown strategy, alongside promoting capacity development and operational support for long-term initiatives (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2018). SIPSP's role was to assist the RSIPF in improving community safety and re-establishing community trust in the police, aligned with the New Zealand government's long-term objective to achieve stability, resilience, and social cohesion in the Solomon Islands (New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade n.d.). While it could be argued that the continued presence of Australian and New Zealand officials reflects concerns surrounding the fragility and volatility of the gains made in the force during the mission, RSIPF officers did not share this view.

The financial capacity and operational capacity of the Solomon Islands (national) government to sustain implemented reform undertakings has been explored by various scholars, including, for example, McDougall (2004), Dinnen and Watson (2019), and Dinnen and Allen (2016). However, the independence of the force and its effectiveness was assessed by local officers using a different lens. Analysis of the data showed that despite the respondents seeing these programmes as well-intentioned initiatives, several identified the lingering presence of advisors from both programmes as unnecessary, impeding the force's independence. For example, **RSIPF officer#6** believed that:

RSIPF is not maybe 100% independent like that, not yet, at least the two programmes must go before we are independent. That's my thought. My personal view on that is that RSIPF come to a place where advisors should be minimised. My personal view, and I believe that maybe qualified or expertise advisors maybe should be in strategic areas only, but not throughout.

This officer highlighted the possibility that the RSIPF might not have been entirely independent of outside influence from the two programmes. They expressed a view that the force, due to the training received during reform, now possessed the ability to effectively run its affairs uninterrupted and uninfluenced. However, this officer was open to collaboration with programme advisors in strategic areas, rather than throughout the entire force.

Moreover, **RSIPF officer#1** highlighted:

What I see is the way that the Australia[ns] still influence policing, in Solomon Island. For the Australian development programme, we have 44 advisors. The connection is not really developing the human resources. When you are an advisor for me then, [I say to them] 'this is what I want help with'. Then you tell me, 'okay, this is how you can do it in the context'. That is capacity development. AFP [Australian Federal Police] officials, advisors—they are doing the thing that they were thinking of, and then try to convince us to accept. But that is not the way that they should do. Currently RSIPF is still lead [*sic*] by AFP, because currently, the commissioner is from AFP.

This respondent's introductory line reveals a belief that despite the mission's completion, RSIPF's operation continued to be shaped by Australia. This included a perception that the current operation of the programme was of no direct benefit to RSIPF's development. The officer's comment that 'when you are an advisor for me then, [I say to them] "this is what I want help with". Then you tell me, "okay, this is how you can do it in the context"' underscored their desire to have input in framing and implementing capacity development initiatives. However, the officer then criticises the programme advisors' capacity development model, stating that 'AFP officials, advisors—they are doing the thing that they were thinking of, and then try to convince us to accept'. This revealed a perception of a hierarchical relationship still at play, in which Australian advisors continued to control officers' actions and, more broadly, the force's direction. Moreover, this officer's interpretation highlights how reform and assistance efforts within the force were reflective of a prevalent, well-studied flaw in donor-led reform, which renders reform supply- rather than demand-driven (Donais 2009a; Krause and Jütersonke 2005).

RSIPF officer#5 also held this viewpoint:

This is where I see us still, we are not independent in terms of decision making. Despite the commissioner wearing the RSIPF the uniform, he was still an Australian.

Although short, this officer's comment offered great insight. It revealed the respondent's view that despite the commissioner's leadership and active engagement in the RSIPF, his actions suggested a prioritisation of Australia and its government over the

development and well-being of the Solomon Islands and the RSIPF. Alternatively, it may reflect a well-intended but mistaken assumption that the interests of both states were one and the same.

RSIPF officer#10 advanced that:

The advisor roles sometimes create some issues within the roles they're supposed to play. [For] example, the human resource, decisions, and even promotions are done in collaborating [*sic*] with them. To me, it's not evidently identified, but I suspect that it still exists. I'm saying that the current leadership of the RSIPF or even the middle managers, the directors are still being pinched or are still being influenced in decision making by listening to the advisors.

This officer's assertion that programme advisors were overly involved in the force indicates a shift in the advisor role from providing occasional support and advice to influencing organisational decisions, including promotions. In light of this, the respondent believed that despite numerous training sessions conducted for the force, the organisation remained influenced by Australian and New Zealand organisational practices.

RSIPF officer#12 told a similar story:

RSIPF is not independent, I think they [advisors] still have influence [on] the Commissioner, they influence the direction and decision making and placement. If they don't want someone, they will have the person removed—the Commissioner is influenced by the advisors. If decisions are made and you don't like it, they say—we'll remove our support.

RSIPF officer#12 shared the view of other officers cited in this section, namely that the RSIPF was not free from external pressure and influence. Additionally, beyond the view espoused by **RSIPF officer#10**, who described the pressure exerted on local officers by external programme advisors, this respondent highlighted the impact of external pressure on the organisational head, the Commissioner. The weight of this influence was exemplified by the revelations that 'if they don't want someone, they will have the person removed', and 'if decisions are made and you don't like it, they say we'll remove our support'. These admissions could be interpreted as threats to ensure that the advisors' wishes and desires were fulfilled, and illustrate the weight and regard placed on the views and opinions of the advisors.

Taken together, these officers' views identify that although reform had significantly developed the force's capacity, this was counterbalanced by the lingering presence and involvement of the intervening forces in strategic advisory positions, which provided them with the ability to intervene in all levels of the force's policy and decision-making processes. The acknowledgment by RSIPF officers of external agents wielding strategic and financial influence over the RSIPF highlighted power imbalances between the countries, revealing an arrangement which rendered the RSIPF unable to achieve or exercise institutional autonomy. The officers' concerns draw attention to the lack of local ownership of institutional processes and highlight the importance of post-conflict states and organisations guarding against the subtle yet unwelcome prolonged external influence and authority, as discussed in the works of Donais (2009b), Baskin (2004), and Hughes and Pupavac (2005). In the Solomon Islands, the mission's drawdown and return of frontline policing authority to the RSIPF signalled both the formal end and represented official confidence in the force's integrity and ability to act independently. Despite these intentions, officers believed that the Australian and New Zealand forces' continued presence and interference in the RSIPF's operations undermined reform efforts, contradicting the objectives upon which the mission was premised. Respondents' unfavourable views of this arrangement revealed a desire for the force to truly be independent and for decision-making authority to be fully transferred to local actors.

Conclusion

The mission has been lauded for the effective restoration of security in the Solomon Islands within its early phase (Allen and Dinnen 2016). Moreover, the RSIPF's reform has been acknowledged by RAMSI and the Solomon Islands government as successful and representative of the gold standard for police reform in the Pacific region (Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI 2017). Despite this prevailing perspective, the views and experiences of post-conflict police reform held by internal stakeholders, the RSIPF, have been underexplored.

The study on which this article is based revealed that local police officers viewed RAMSI-led reform positively. Respondents highlighted how institutional reconfiguration increased officers' policing knowledge and competence, helping to restore public trust and confidence in the RSIPF. However, RSIPF officers equally identified numerous drawbacks to the organisation. One shared perception was that reform brought a significant decline in the force's standard of discipline. This was attributed to shorter training for new recruits and assimilation of foreign policing cultures, including codes of dress and conduct. Respondents believed that new officers lacked full understanding of their duties as police officers and instead carried out a type

of policing alien to the Solomon Islands context. High levels of colonial nostalgia underscored the respondents' perspectives, with their narratives reflecting frustration, disappointment, and disapproval with contemporary policing. Despite its colonial undertones, they also showed an affinity for the traditional style of policing.

Continued presence and influence of Australian and New Zealand officials in the RSIPF's affairs after the drawdown was believed to have undermined the force's independence. It was perceived that advisors to the RSIPF had become overly involved in the organisation's processes, with their presence influencing decisions made within the force and their preferences influencing the force's strategic direction. While advocates of this transitional arrangement may argue for donor oversight to safeguard investment of significant financial and operational support, ongoing oversight risks undermining the core values upon which reform is premised, instead perpetuating a culture of dependency and hindering institutional autonomy.

The critical perspectives shared by these officers at the culmination of the mission reflects not only the opinions of those in the Global South but also those of change recipients in post-conflict security sector reform. This article contributes to the scholarship on internal stakeholder perceptions of post-conflict police reform efforts through analysing the officers' nuanced revelations. This work has assessed inherent, often unacknowledged, weaknesses in reform mandates, deepening the discourse on donor-led reform efforts and advocating for a more holistic approach when designing, reviewing, and assessing future reform mandates and endeavours. While the sample size of respondents in this study is relatively small and reflects the views of senior officers within the RSIPF, the perspectives presented herein provide valuable insights into how police reform initiatives can be experienced and perceived by police officers in a post-conflict, small island developing state context. The sensitivity of concerns raised in this study should be earnestly and thoroughly explored by all stakeholders in the post-conflict restoration process. Only through applying openness and reflexivity can future reform efforts steer clear of these pitfalls and be unanimously hailed by all stakeholders as resoundingly successful.

Correspondence: Dr Cassandra Harry, Assistant Professor at The University of Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago. Cassandra.Harry@utt.edu.tt.

¹RAMSI was an intervention mission sent to the Solomon Islands to address the ethnic conflict. A Special Coordinator headed the deployment, which comprised of 2,225 military, police and civilian officials drawn from 11 Pacific Islands. The mission was predominantly led and funded by Australia and New Zealand.

References

- Africa S (2008) South Africa: SSR after apartheid. In Donais T (ed.) *Local ownership and security sector reform*: 169-189. Wien, Vienna: Verlag GmbH & Co. KG.
- Allen M and Dinnen S (2016) Beyond life support? Reflections on Solomon Islands after the Regional Assistance Mission. *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies* 3(1): 6-15. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.120>.
- Ansorg N (2017) Security sector reform in Africa: Donor approaches versus local needs. *Contemporary Security Policy* 38(1): 129-144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2016.1278343>.
- Australian Federal Police (2016) *Solomon Islands Police Development Program 2017-2021 design document*. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/sipdp-design.pdf>.
- Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2018). *Aid Program Performance Report 2017-18 Solomon Islands September 2018*. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/solomon-islands-appr-2017-18.pdf>.
- Baskin M (2004) Review essay: Between exit and engagement: On the division of authority in transitional administrations international peacekeeping. *Global Governance* 10(1): 119-137. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27800513>.
- Bayley DH (2008) Post-conflict police reform: Is Northern Ireland a model? *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* 2(2): 233-240. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pan026>.
- Bezrukova K, Spell CS, Perry JL and Jehn KA (2016) A meta-analytical integration of over 40 years of research on diversity training evaluation. *Psychological Bulletin* 142(11): 1227-1274. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/bul0000067>.
- Bluestone J, Johnson P, Fullerton J, Carr C, Alderman J and BonTempo J (2013) Effective in-service training design and delivery: Evidence from an integrative literature review. *Human Resources for Health* 11(1): 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1478-4491-11-51>.
- Blumberg DM, Schlosser MD, Papazoglou K, Creighton S and Kaye CC (2019) New directions in police academy training: A call to action. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16(24): 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16244941>.
- Brogden M and Nijhar P (2013) *Community policing*. New York: Routledge.
- Caparini M (2010) Civil society and the future of security sector reform. In Sedra M (ed.) *The future of security sector reform*: 244-262. Ontario: Centre for International Governance Innovation.
- Celador GC (2005) Police reform: Peacebuilding through 'democratic policing'? *International Peacekeeping* 12(3): 364-376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310500074184>.
- Chesterman S (2007) Ownership in theory and in practice: Transfer of authority in UN statebuilding operations. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 1(1): 3-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502970601075873>.
- Conti N and Nolan III JJ (2005) Policing the platonic cave: Ethics and efficacy in police training. *Policing and Society* 15(2): 166-186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439460500071705>.
- Council on Criminal Justice (2021) *Effectiveness of police training - policy assessment*. https://assets.foleon.com/eu-central-1/de-uploads-7e3kk3/41697/effectiveness_of_police_training_f83a079a3503.pdf.
- den Heyer G (2010) Evaluating police reform in post-conflict nations: A Solomon Islands case study. *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice* 34(1): 213-234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01924036.2010.9678824>.
- Dinnen S (2012) The Solomon Islands—RAMSI, transition and future prospects. *Security Challenges* 8(4): 61-72. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26462891>.
- Dinnen S (2019) Security governance in Melanesia: Police, prisons and crime. In Hirsch E and Rollason W (eds) *The Melanesian world* 1st ed: 269-284. New York: Routledge.
- Dinnen S and Allen M (2016) State absence and state formation in Solomon Islands: Reflections on agency, scale and hybridity. *Development and Change* 47(1): 76-97. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12212>.
- Dinnen S and Watson D (2019) Police reform in a post-conflict context: The case of Solomon Islands. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* 15(1): 387-398. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paz078>.
- Divon SA (2017) Police reform and power in post conflict societies. *European Journal of Policing Studies* 4(3): 269-298. <https://doi.org/10.5553/ejps%2F2034760x2017004003002>.
- Donais T (2009a) Empowerment or imposition? Dilemmas of local ownership in post-conflict peacebuilding processes. *Peace & Change* 34(1): 3-26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.2009.00531.x>.
- Donais T (2009b) Inclusion or exclusion? Local ownership and security sector reform. *Studies in Social Justice* 3(1): 117-131. <https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v3i1.1027>.
- Duffey T (2000) Cultural issues in contemporary peacekeeping. *International Peacekeeping* 7(1): 142-168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310008413823>.
- Goldsmith A and Dinnen S (2007) Transnational police building: Critical lessons from Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands. *Third World Quarterly* 28(6): 1091-1109. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20454984>.
- Harry C (2021) *Post conflict intervention: A study of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) contribution to institutional changes within the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) in the Solomon Islands*. Suva: The University of the South Pacific.

- Harry C and Watson D (2022) “Staka Woman Tumas”: An examination of police perspectives on gender-balancing within the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force. *Women & Criminal Justice* 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2022.2071377>.
- Harry C, Watson D and Nanau G (2023) Balancing the scale. In Watson D, Amin SA, Wallace WC, Akinlabi OM and Ruiz-Vásquez JC (eds) *Policing the Global South colonial legacies, pluralities, partnerships, and reform* 1st ed: 137-149. New York: Routledge.
- Hendrickson D and Jolliffe K (2018) *Security integration in conflict-affected societies: Considerations for Myanmar*. Saferworld. <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1185-security-integration-in-conflict-affected-societies-considerations-for-myanmar>.
- Hughes C and Pupavac V (2005) Framing post-conflict societies: International pathologisation of Cambodia and the post-Yugoslav states. *Third World Quarterly* 26(6): 873-889. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4017815>.
- Johnson RR (2017) The psychological influence of the police uniform. *Police1*, 11 August. <https://www.policeone.com/police-products/apparel/uniforms/articles/the-psychological-influence-of-the-police-uniform-bhN9cdehTsvjzbMh/>.
- Kakachia K and O’Shea L (2012) Why does police reform appear to have been more successful in Georgia than in Kyrgyzstan or Russia? *The Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Societies* 13. <https://doi.org/10.4000/pipss.3964>.
- Karp S and Stenmark H (2011) Learning to be a police officer. Tradition and change in the training and professional lives of police officers. *Police Practice and Research* 12(1): 4-15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2010.497653>.
- Kleygrewe L, Oudejans RRD, Koedijk M and Hutter RI (2022) Police training in practice: Organization and delivery according to European law enforcement agencies. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12: 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.798067>.
- Kocak D (2018) *Rethinking community policing in international police reform: Examples from Asia*. London: Ubiquity Press.
- Krause K and Jütersonke O (2005) Peace, security and development in post-conflict environments. *Security Dialogue* 36(4): 447-462. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26298947>.
- Law DM (2006) *The post-conflict security sector. Policy Paper No. 14*. Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces. https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/PP14_post_conflictss.pdf.
- Liao G, Zhou J and Yin J (2022) Effect of organizational socialization of new employees on team innovation performance: A cross-level model. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management* 15: 1017-1031. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S359773>.
- Loh J (2010) *Success factors for police reform in post-conflict situations*. Berlin: Hertie School of Governance. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/71738943.pdf>.
- Matsuzawa S (2016) A donor influenced by local dynamics: Unintended consequences of capacity building in China. *Sociology of Development* 2(2): 51-59. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1525/sod.2016.2.1.51>.
- McDougall D (2004) Intervention in Solomon Islands. *The Round Table* 93(374): 213–223. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358530410001679548>.
- McInnes E, Middleton S, Gardner G, Haines M, Haertsch M, Paul CL and Castaldi P (2012) A qualitative study of stakeholder views of the conditions for and outcomes of successful clinical networks. *BMC Health Services Research* 12(1): 49. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-12-96>.
- Meiske M and Ruggeri A (2017) Peacekeeping as a tool of foreign policy. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 26 September. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.462>.
- Mobekk E (2010a) Gender, women and security sector reform. *International Peacekeeping* 17(2): 278-291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533311003625142>
- Mobekk E (2010b) Security sector reform and the challenges of ownership. In Sedra M (ed.) *The future of security sector reform*: 230-243. Ontario: The Centre for International Governance Innovation.
- Morgan THS, Murphy D and Horwitz B (2017) Police reform through data-driven management. *Police Quarterly* 20(3): 275-294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611117709785>.
- Murray T (2007) Police-building in Afghanistan: A case study of civil security reform. *International Peacekeeping* 14(1): 108-126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310601114327>.
- Neack L (1995) UN Peace-keeping: In the interest of community or self? *Journal of Peace Research* 32(2): 181-196. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/425066>.
- Neild R (2006) Democratic police reforms in war-torn societies. *Conflict, Security & Development* 1(01): 21–43. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14678800100590596>.
- New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade (n.d.) *Our development cooperation in Solomon Islands*. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/countries-and-regions/australia-and-pacific/solomon-islands/new-zealand-high-commission-to-the-solomon-islands/our-development-cooperation-in-solomon-islands>.
- Pino NW and Ellison G (2012) *Globalization, Police reform and development: Doing it the Western way?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Pino NW and Wiatrowski MD (2006) Policing and police reform in the US: Adequate for export? In Pino NW and Wiatrowski MD (eds) *Democratic policing in transitional and developing countries*: 43-68. New York: Routledge.
- Quah JST (2006) Preventing police corruption in Singapore: The role of recruitment, training and socialisation. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* 28(1): 59-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23276665.2006.10779315>.
- Rauch J and Van der Spuy E (2006) *Police reform in post-conflict Africa: A review*. Pretoria: Safety and Security Programme of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA). https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Elrena-Spuy/publication/265266258_POLICE_REFORM_IN_POST-CONFLICT_AFRICA_A_REVIEW/links/56eef6d108aea35d5b9a39e8/POLICE-REFORM-IN-POST-CONFLICT-AFRICA-A-REVIEW.pdf.
- Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (n.d.) 70 recruits graduate to join RSIPF ranks. <https://www.rsipf.gov.sb/?q=node/98>.
- Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (2019) *Royal Solomon Islands Police Force annual report 2018*. <https://www.rsipf.gov.sb/?q=node/1355>.
- Smith JA, Flowers P and Larkin M (2009) *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: theory, method and research*. London: SAGE Publications Limited.
- Solomon Islands Government and RAMSI (2017) *Regional assistance mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) 2003-2017. A joint report by the Solomon Islands and RAMSI on the 14-year intervention*. Honiara: Office of the Prime Minister.
- Tomforde M (2010) Introduction: The distinctive role of culture in peacekeeping. *International Peacekeeping* 17(4): 450-456. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2010.516650>.
- Van der Spuy E (2000) Foreign donor assistance and policing reform in South Africa. *Policing and Society* 10(4): 343-366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2000.9964849>.
- Watson D and Dinnen S (2020) Contextualising policing in Melanesia: History, adaptation and adoption problematised. In Amin S, Watson D and Girard C (eds) *Mapping security in the Pacific*: 161-173. London: Routledge.
- Wood DA and Tong S (2009) The future of initial police training: A university perspective. *International Journal of Police Science & Management* 11(3): 294-305. <https://doi.org/10.1350/ijps.2009.11.3.131>.