State Society *and* Governance *in* Melanesia

THE ECP AND AUSTRALIA'S MIDDLE POWER AMBITIONS

ALLAN PATIENCE

By late 2004, Australia and Papua New Guinea appeared to have agreed on a new course for their now-close, now-distant relationship. To be known officially as the Enhanced Cooperation Program (ECP), the new course signaled a more interventionist role by Australia in assisting – or directing – Papua New Guinea's efforts to improve its governance institutions and effectiveness. The ECP does not come out of the blue. Rather, it is the most recent development in some 120 years of colonial and post-independence contact between Australia and PNG. It is important to recall this background as we seek clearer understandings of the ECP's objectives and its likelihood of success, however measured.

I: INTRODUCTION

Australia's new interventionism in the South Pacific was heralded in a broad-ranging speech by Prime Minister John Howard in July 2003:

[O]ur friends and neighbours in the Pacific are looking to us for leadership and we cannot fail them. And the rest of the world, understandably, sees this as an area where Australia has particular responsibilities. (Howard 2003)

This new focus by Australia on the region is motivated in the first instance by security fears arising from post-independence mutations of traditional ("wantok" and "bigman") structures of power into virulent forms of crony politics. The security fears include the making of "inappropriate" alliances (e.g., with Taiwan) that could destabilize the region, facilitating the activities of international crime syndicates (drugs, guns, and people-smuggling, money-laundering, piracy), and providing (wittingly or otherwise) bases or through-fares for terrorist groups like Jemaah Islamiah (Dupont 2001; van Fossen 2003).

There is also growing evidence that this mutating cronyism in South Pacific political systems is resistant to democratic institutions, transparency in government, and conventional state-making strategies. It might reflect, as Christopher Clapham has observed, "the inability of many states and societies at the local level to meet the onerous demands that state maintenance makes on them" (Clapham 2004: 77). At the very least, the idea of the modern state remains highly problematic in the region – and this appears especially to be the case in Papua New Guinea (Ballard 1981; Dinnen 1997; May 2003; Gelu 2003; Gelu 2004).

The negative consequences of post-independence politics include poor economic performances and widespread collapses in essential government services – e.g., hospitals and medical aid posts, schools, transport and communications, security and policing. They result in manipulated election results and debauched political institutions. They are the basis of random – usually gratuitous – human rights violations by fragments of state agencies (e.g., police units and defence force units) often acting autonomously from their command structures. They are a source of inordinate levels of violence, crime and corruption. They add up to a great deal of human misery, with thousands of people suffering needlessly and dying prematurely. All of these problems are painfully evident – and they are increasing – in contemporary Papua New Guinea.[1]

But it is not principally the human dimensions of this evolving governance catastrophe that stirred Australia to adopt its renewed approach to the region. As already noted, there is growing anxiety that the South Pacific is turning into a region of instability, threatening Australia's security interests and the interests of important allies. And within this anxiety is a marked desire to blame that instability on "failing states" thought to be emerging of their own accord in the region.

This hardening orthodoxy ignores the fact that in almost all post-colonial situations, top-down state-making – much of it the result of decolonization processes and subsequent foreign aid, foreign investment and trade, and other neo-colonial interventions – has been far less successful than anticipated. In not a few instances it has failed abysmally. John Ballard has explained that this is because "The state itself was a colonial concept, imposed upon pre-colonial societies with disregard for their own structures and boundaries except where pre-colonial states provided useful adjuncts through indirect rule" (Ballard 1981: 3). If this remains unacknowledged, blunders will continue to be made. Their perpetrators will continue blaming victims, instead of working with them to counter the mounting problems. A large proportion of these problems are legacies from colonial times; others are well and truly homegrown.

Fresh models of state-making are therefore needed. They must draw on grassroots community experiences, as well as employing and adapting conventional methods of development planning and implementation.

II: AUSTRALIAN SECURITY ANXIETIES AND THE SOUTH PACIFIC

The recent ratcheting up of Australia's intervention in the South Pacific arises, in the first instance, from entrenched collective anxieties about its geo-political location (Broinowski 1993; FitzGerald 1997; Walker 1999). The Asia-Pacific region still evokes baleful and/or paternalistic reactions from many Australians – reactions that are occasionally shared and sometimes cynically manipulated by their leaders. So it should not be all that surprising that Australia's regional phobias have intensified in the face of perceived political disorder and governance decay in some South Pacific states.

While the 2004 Australian general election outcome was mostly a result of "aspirational voters" punting on low interest rates being maintained by the Howard Government, security issues were also significant in ensuring the Coalition's return on 9th October (Barker 2005).[2] Prevailing neo-conservative rhetoric coupled with alarmist media coverage misinforms the public, encouraging paranoia about the world situation and deep suspicion of the foreign "other" – especially the Islamic "other". This is what many Australians have been experiencing in the wake of the destruction of New York's World Trade Centre in September 2001, the Bali bombings in 2003, and the bombing outside the Australian Embassy in Jakarta in 2004. It intensifies every time an abducted victim is beheaded, or another suicide bomber explodes him or herself somewhere, in which innocent bystanders are the main casualties, and the gruesome details appear on the Al Jazeera network and are then replayed on Western networks.

In many voters' minds Australia seems dangerously remote from its natural allies, isolated in a region that is still unfamiliar and therefore threatening.[3] This sentiment is potently present in Australia's political culture, lurking in the interstices of Pauline Hanson's all but defunct One Nation Party and successor groups like the rising Family First Party, and in the paranoid fringes of the National Party and the ALP (see, e.g., Stokes 2000). Incubating within this cultural mix are right-wing Pentecostal and fundamentalist Christian sects preaching eschatological doctrines of exclusive salvation and post-Cold War Western triumphalism.[4] These groups have strong evangelical overtones and are increasingly connected to neo-conservative political organizations. Some of their political consequences are evident in recent electoral trends in Australia and the USA.[5]

III: MIDDLE POWER, OR BIG-NOTING?

The new Australian interventionism in the South Pacific is a manifestation of the country's self-image as a middle power in global affairs. The proponents of this assertiveness point out that Australia is a close ally of the USA hyper-power, that it is a role model for representative democratic institutions in the region, that it is a major exemplar and advocate of Western values in the region, and that it is the dominant influence in the regional politics of the South Pacific. In an address to the National Press Club in Canberra in November 2003, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer made it clear that he has no doubts about Australia's regional and global significance:

> We are a strong commonwealth with about the 12th largest economy in the world. We are one of the most successful, peaceful and well-governed democracies in history. Rather than a middling nation, we are a considerable power, the sixth largest in total land mass. (Downer 2003)

This official view of Australia in the world is echoed in recent foreign policy pronouncements about Australia being America's "deputy" in the region, even America's "deputy sheriff". While mainly intended for domestic political consumption, this sort of talk does not go down well in Kuala Lumpur or Jakarta. And it sorely irritates those whom Tony Abbott refers to as the "commentariat" in Australia. However, it resonates harmoniously with aspirational voters in increasingly neo-conservative electorates. They applaud the big-noting; it reassures and mobilizes them.

During the 2004 election campaign the Prime Minister repeated previous declarations that Australia has the right to strike against potential terrorist bases in the territories of neighbouring sovereign states. Alexander Downer hastened to smooth the ruffled feathers of several Southeast Asian governments, explaining that the Prime Minister meant certain "failing states" in the South Pacific. He did not name the states to which he was referring. The fact that both the Prime Minister's declarations and the Foreign Minister's claims were perceived at least as offensively in the South Pacific, but that no Australian qualification or apology was subsequently forthcoming, is indicative of Australian Government attitudes towards the region.

IV: AUSTRALIA AND PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Principally focused on its own security, Australia's imagining of PNG has mostly been coloured by paternalism, particularly when Sir Paul Hasluck was Minister for External Territories in the Menzies Government (Hasluck 1976; Millar 1978; Downs 1980; Porter 1994; Fry 1997). Hasluck argued that Australia would have to remain the colonial power for decades to come (Hasluck 1976). In the wake of the 1962-63 Foot Report to the UN, and the World Bank Report in 1966, later conservative Ministers (e.g., Charles Barnes) began conceding that some form of self-government or independence (preferably, in their view, the former) would have to come about earlier than Hasluck had anticipated (Downs 1980: 239-248; Millar 1979: 313-316; see also Griffin et al. 1979). But it never seemed to cross their minds that Australia's stolid policies might have been inhibiting social, political and economic development in PNG.[6] Like many an apology for colonialism, the paternalist approach of Australia's administration in PNG was continually dressed up as a case of acting in the best interests of the "natives". It is true that throughout Australia's colonial administration Papua New Guineans' interests were sometimes realised – but only when they meshed with Australia's interests.

So, in 1973, prompted by its ham-fisted Minister for Overseas Territories, Bill Morrison, the Whitlam Government began pushing PNG towards an early independence, even though many Papua New Guineans were deeply disturbed by what it might mean for them. Highlanders, for example, were worried that they would be politically, educationally, and economically disadvantaged compared to coastal and islander Papuans and New Guineans. Papuans and Islanders were anxious about invasions of uncouth Highlanders in their midst. A mature-age university student, recalling his feelings as a school boy about the approach of independence, has noted:

> The news broke out and everyone in town [Madang] was frightened. I was dead scared after the speculation of nationwide bloodshed. At school we approached the headmaster (an Australian) and asked him many questions about our safety. (Kamya 2005)

These fears have been justified by subsequent periods of political mismanagement, especially during the years of the Chan, Wingti and Skate Governments (Dorney 1990; Dorney 1998).

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In pushing PNG into an early independence, Gough Whitlam first sought to appease African states that were critical in the UN of what they saw as Australia's desultory colonial record in PNG. The irony is that African post-colonial hubris and naivety about PNG combined to push for a problematic independence. Conservative commentators such as Peter Ryan defensively refer to this period as "Whitlam's cardinal blunder: the infliction on the reluctant people of Papua New Guinea of an "independence" that was unkind and unwise" (Ryan 2004: 96).

A second group Whitlam sought to appease constituted an emerging political leadership in PNG that from the late 1960s had been demanding independence. Initially this leadership was idealistic, anti-colonialist, and full of great energy and promise. Leaders within and around the early Pangu Pati, and then those connected with the Constitutional Planning Committee, shared a vision of a rapidly developing PNG state bringing widespread benefits to its people.[7] Some of this idealism is evident in the Constitution, in the original Eight Point Plan, and in policy intentions to adapt development strategies to the so-called "Melanesian Way", and vice versa. But by the 1980s, much of the fire had gone out of this radical politics. Public office came largely to be sought for its perks and trappings – private business developments and related get-rich-quick opportunities, imperial knighthoods, frequent overseas travel, large cars, official residences, generous parliamentary salaries and electoral allowances. Some leaders over-estimated their capacities to deliver good governance. Some of them are still in power, practicing the same kinds of politics, contributing little to nation-building and much to state weakness in PNG.

Whitlam followed a trend set by Evatt and Menzies for Australian prime ministers and foreign ministers to travel the world assuming the mantle of an influential middle power (Watt 1968; Leaver and Cox 1997). Amidst the diplomacy in this vaulting ambition, PNG in particular, and the South Pacific generally, mostly disappeared off Australia's diplomatic radar. Nonetheless Australian aid to the PNG Government continued, on the assumption that development was proceeding smoothly. The over-riding official concern in Australia was to avoid being accused of neo-colonialism. Better to follow a policy of benign neglect than one requiring active engagement that could be misconstrued in an international climate of narrow political correctness.

Much of the official government-to-government aid provided by Australia at this time came without strings attached.[8] This was widely seen as progressive because it permitted PNG's leaders to set their own priorities. Meanwhile Australia remained remote, preoccupied with what its leaders saw as more auspicious foreign and defence policy objectives. But as things started to deteriorate in PNG, Australia's aloofness was to prove disastrous. Some Australian policy makers realized that AusAID, with its substantial development experience from the 1970s, could address specific crises in PNG. Yet by the time things were really serious, AusAID had already lost its limited clout in Canberra.

There are few if any systematic measures of the effectiveness of Australian aid to PNG – amounting to about $15.5 billion in today's dollars. (Indeed there are few scholarly accounts of the effectiveness of international aid anywhere.) Despite all the hand-wringing accompanying it, and despite some trenchantly doctrinaire attacks on Australian aid to the South Pacific, official Australia took little interest in what was happening to its near north and made only half-hearted attempts to engage with PNG's leaders.

However by the late 1990s, international necessity mothered a change in Australian attitudes. The Prime Minister was becoming more confident in the international arena. At the same time he needed convincing grounds for resisting George W. Bush's pressures to send more Australian troops to Iraq. So the Government reversed its earlier policy of distancing itself from the Asia Pacific. It became committed to helping establish an independent state in East Timor. It took a major role in the Bougainville peace process.

Following the international terrorist attacks in September 2001 the momentum of change noticeably increased. In 2003 Prime Minister Howard attended the annual meeting of the South Pacific Forum and strong-armed the other South Pacific heads to agree to the appointment of an Australian as the new Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum.[9] He successfully supported the appointment of an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to recommend proposals for improving regional cooperation and integration in the region (Pacific Islands Forum 2004a; Pacific Islands Forum 2004b).[10] Significantly, the first decision to emerge from these promising discussions within the Forum is an agreement for a study of security cooperation in the region. The study is funded by Australia and New Zealand, each contributing a million dollars. But perhaps the most surprising element in the renewal of Australian interest in the South Pacific was the announcement of the Enhanced Cooperation Program: the ECP.

V: ENTER THE ECP

If the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) is one of the early steps towards reshaping Australia's approaches to the South Pacific, then the ECP in PNG is another. The ECP was conceived in Canberra and remains principally an Australian government initiative. Even so, some leading PNG politicians and leaders actively encouraged its gestation and attended its birth. As Mike Manning has pointed out:

> It was not forced on PNG by Australia in any way. PNG ministers realised there were serious problems [...] and took the initiative to seek assistance to solve the problem. (Manning 2005)

It is noteworthy that the ECP is *not* part of a regional consensus on action to be taken in PNG. This is in contrast to the commitments to Bougainville and RAMSI which are both multilateral arrangements. The ECP is an example of Australian unilateralism. Its advocates insist that it is aimed at bolstering the PNG state against service delivery breakdowns, a growing law and order crisis, political decay, and endemic corruption in politics, business, and the public service. In this respect it is both continuous with past practices and a departure from those practices. In the past, aid schemes targeted similar institutions to those being targeted by the ECP – e.g., the police. But the ECP differs from past practice in that the assistance is coming not from advisers, but from Australian officers placed in in-line positions. This represents a significant shift, from private consultants and contractors formerly hired by agencies like AusAID, to seconded Australian public servants and police officers operating in PNG.

When it reaches its full strength (around mid-2005), the ECP will entail the deployment of 210 Australian police officers and about 70 senior public servants in PNG. At the outset, it was suggested that the ECP would be all about experienced Australian police training PNG police to be more effective in law and order problem zones. The senior Australian public servants would assume mentoring and supervising roles in strategically located public service posts – in Treasury, Finance, Personnel Management, and the Attorney-General's Departments. In due course some Australian judges and legal officials would be integrated into the PNG judicial system. This is labeled as a "whole of government approach" to PNG, to distinguish it from the old targeted aid project approaches. A guarantee was made that no Papua New Guineans would lose their jobs as a result of ECP deployments.[11]

There are two goals being aimed at by the ECP that complement Australia's over-riding security concerns.

First, the ECP is intended as a capacity-building exercise. Senior Australian bureaucrats, police officers and legal personnel are expected to play a major skills-transfer role while they are in PNG. This includes mentoring, supervising, instructing, and providing resources to Papua New Guineans, to enable them to perform at more effective levels in their professional tasks. They in turn will pass on their skills to the next generation of Papua New Guineans.

Second, administrative and crime control measures have been promised to deal with immediate governance problems. If the RAMSI model has any relevance, some senior PNG politicians, public servants, police officers, law officers, and business figures should soon be languishing in gaol. Indeed one of the real tests of the ECP's eventual legitimacy in PNG will depend on just how swiftly some notorious public figures end up behind bars. Not a few Papua New Guineans look forward to this happening.

VI: WHY THE ECP?

There are four broad influences shaping the Australian government's ECP in PNG.

(i) Terrorism/Security

Concerns about terrorism have inflamed many governments' fears about security since September 2001. In Australia these fears were fanned by the bombings in Bali and Jakarta. There is no doubt that the Howard Government is preoccupied with security issues. But it has rather too adroitly linked the issues of asylum-seekers and international terrorism. The Government's professed concerns therefore have to be weighed against distorted accounts of children being thrown overboard by their asylum-seeking parents and the *Tampa* crisis during the 2002 election campaign, misleading reports about the sinking of the vessel SIEV X, and rubbery rationales supplied for Australia's commitment to the Iraq war (see, e.g., analyses by Marr and Wilkinson 2003; Kevin 2003; Broinowski 2004; Manne with Corlett 2004; Gaita 2004). Almost all of the official accounts of these matters have been shown to be the result of inaccurate intelligence advice and/or dissembling by politicians. At the very least, the Howard Government's *political* balance, in its responses to the threat of terrorism, and in related security

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issues, are open to serious doubt. So too is the competence of its intelligence agencies. We may have to wait for the thirty-year embargo to expire before scholars can examine the relevant archives thoroughly on these matters – cold comfort for some of us.

(ii) RAMSI self-congratulation

Official self-congratulation about the RAMSI intervention is part of a growing confidence that Australia can intervene in the region, including PNG, with positive results (Wainwright 2003). The reasoning is that if RAMSI can succeed, then the ECP will also succeed. But there are two flaws in this logic.

First, whether optimism about RAMSI is justified remains to be seen. Things can still go wrong, as is evident in the killing of an Australian police officer in Honiara in December 2004. The Anglican Bishop of Malaita has offered a sobering account of the intervention thus far:

> [T]here is a major disparity between RAMSI's rhetoric of staying for ten to 15 years in the Solomons, bringing peace and prosperity, and the reality of re-emerging violence, increasing poverty and unemployment, high school fees, a down-ward spiraling economy, higher inflation and lower incomes, declining medical services, ongoing corruption in government ministries, lack of planning and implementation of how Solomon Islanders will competently run all parts of their own government, crumbling infrastructure, millions and millions of RAMSI funds spent on Australians with money going back to Australia with minimum cash benefit for Solomon Islanders, continued centralizing of everything in Honiara, etc. (Brown 2005)

There are growing demands from some Solomon Islands politicians for an early date for a RAMSI withdrawal. These moves are based, in part, on naked self-interest – some of them might be fearful of arrest for corruption, or on other criminal charges. But they are also based on concerns that things are starting to go wrong, or that they are not going right – thus echoing the bishop's observations.

Second, even if these worries can (or will) be addressed, RAMSI remains a multilateral arrangement. The ECP is a bi-lateral arrangement – though some in PNG see it as Australian unilateralism. This multilateralism has given the RAMSI intervention a higher degree of legitimacy than the ECP is likely to engender, at least in the short term.

(iii) The failed state orthodoxy

The Australian Government appears to be under the influence of aid critics like Helen Hughes whose thesis is that PNG's system of governance is all but dysfunctional. Her analysis assumes that the infrastructure and administrative culture of the modern state should be replicated, or be in process of advanced replication, in PNG, regardless of traditional structures. This "Eurocentric" statist model stresses law and order, the openness of the state to international market forces, and "transparency" in relation to the applications of international aid and investment regimes. One could be forgiven for thinking that it is about states that can make trains run on time, rather than states that are committed to what Amartya Sen has famously referred to as "development as freedom" (Sen 2000). It also uncritically assumes a form of state construction that would facilitate "predatory globalization" (Falk 1999). As such, its theoretical ramifications and policy consequences need painstaking interrogation and comprehensive revision.

This is not to deny that there are severe law and order problems in PNG. Basic services are not reaching far from the major centres. Even within the major centres services are, at best, unpredictable (although electricity blackouts and failures in the water supply in Port Moresby are predictable in the sense they will occur when least anticipated). The spread of HIV/AIDS is catastrophic. Population growth is outstripping economic growth. Violence and crime are increasing at worrying rates (Nibbrig 1992; Goddard 1992; Strathern 1993, Goddard 1995; Levantis 1997; Dinnen 1998; Dinnen 1999; Nibbrig 2002). It is well known that corruption is endemic throughout politics, the public service, the courts, and the police force (see, e.g., Okole and Kavanamur 2003). Indeed it is so well known that it is now widely taken for granted – Papua New Guineans are beginning – wearily, despairingly – to tolerate the intolerable in their governments.

(iv) Treasury versus AusAID

There is a growing belief that the Howard government has become impatient with the ways in which its aid programs have been administered by AusAID and related agencies. Senior Canberra officials (in Treasury, perhaps influenced by Hughes' economism, in Prime Minister's and Cabinet, and in Foreign Affairs and Trade) are concluding that past programs have not stemmed the growing governance crisis in PNG. A new (or is it a return to the old?) realism seems to be replacing AusAID idealism. Hugh White puts

it bluntly: "It [helping PNG] cannot be done through the conventional forms of development aid" (White 2005). A similar view was put by the Australian Treasurer in a speech on 3 August 2004. In this speech Peter Costello aired his concern (and maybe echoed his bureaucrats' concerns) that "aid can hinder as well as help" governments that come to "rely on donors to provide essential services to their peoples":

> A striking example of the limitations of aid has been the economic performance of the Pacific in recent years. If we look at the Pacific growth record from 1992-2002 GDP per capita growth was less than one percent, in a period of time when all aid flows per capita to the region averaged US$96 – the highest of any region in the world. […]
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> The link between good governance and the effectiveness of aid gives rise to concern where countries have relatively poor governance. In such cases we need to review our discussions about increasing overall aid levels – which we know will be of no help in such circumstances – to how we can use existing aid to improve governance, grow capital and build institutions. […]
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> The RAMSI and ECP missions represent an integrated whole of government approach to improving governance. This is about much more than law and order, it includes ways for improving the justice system, economic management, public sector reform and border management. For example, there are now around 15 senior Treasury staff in PNG, Solomon Islands and Nauru alongside local staff in key areas such as financial control, debt management and economic reform. (Costello 2004)

It is in the context of these four broad influences that the ECP has begun to be implemented in PNG. With this involvement (amounting to A$805 million over the four year period to June 2008, in addition to the annual aid program of A$330 million) Australian authorities hope that some of PNG's main governance failings will be addressed. In its latest policy document, AusAID appears to have accommodated itself to this new approach:

> A fundamental policy shift by Australia has sharpened the focus of engagement through necessity following the deterioration of security in the Solomon Islands and in the context of global security and the understanding that a porous and undeveloped region is not in the interests of the Pacific or Australia. (Australian Government, AusAID, 2004: 4)

VII: ECP IMPLEMENTATION

Nonetheless, not a few experts believe that, if the ECP remains a short-term strategy, it will fail. Governance capacity in PNG will continue to decline, possibly to levels of a Haiti or a Zimbabwe. More will need to be done. This must include well-informed bottom-up community development programs and related schemes – e.g., addressing the worsening squatter settlements crisis, attacking high unemployment rates, stopping widespread violence against women, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and other pandemics, and providing for better family and child care.[12] In the case of PNG's HIV/AIDS crisis, effective AusAID programs should be seen as a model for future planning. In addition, top-down assistance is essential to drastically overhaul capacity-building institutions, especially in the technical and higher education sectors. And a sensitive and intelligent balance of bottom-up and top-down planning is critical for rebuilding basic infrastructure (and in some cases building it for the first time) – e.g., roads, housing, schools, and hospitals and medical aid posts (especially for women and for people living with HIV/AIDS). As the ASPI report rightly advises:

> Strengthening the national government capabilities and institutions that PNG needs is going to take our neighbour a long time, so our program of support likewise needs to have a long time frame. Nothing lasting can be achieved in three or five years, and little enough in a decade. We need to think instead in terms of generations. (Australian Strategic and Policy Institute 2004: 41; see also White 2005)

VIII: RESPONSES TO THE ECP

What have been some early responses to the ECP?

There is a danger the ECP will become a latter day cargo cult, with over-heated Papua New Guinean expectations about what the ECP can and should deliver. In rural areas especially, there is a growing nostalgia for the colonial

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era – "taim bilong masta". Old people pine for a return to the days when services seemed reliable and the authorities – and the kiaps – gave them more than a passing glance. Young people are disillusioned (in growing numbers and with increasing bitterness) with their politicians and feel defeated in the face of the enormous challenges facing their country. They see little future for themselves, or for the next generation. They are constantly struggling against inadequate facilities for training and higher education. There are few meaningful jobs or careers to which they can look forward. Their political leaders seem loftily unconcerned by their plight. So they are likely to look to something like the ECP as a panacea for their problems. Are Australians aware of this growing expectation? Do they realize that they are heightening expectations across the country?

Then there is the complacent but widespread belief in PNG that, if a problem can't be solved by Papua New Guineans, you can usually get the Australians in – to fix the roads, build the bridges, fund HIV/AIDS programs, provide IT services for schools, and so on. Big brother will nearly always come good if the need is urgent enough.[13] This family metaphor is dangerous. While some Papua New Guineans might think of Australia in quasi-familial terms, there is little doubt that Australia looks at PNG through spectacles that focus sharply on its own security and economic interests.

Even so, there are misgivings in PNG about the ECP. The most outspoken exponent of this position is the Governor of Morobe Province, Luther Wenge. Wenge has opposed the ECP since its inception – though he voted for its enabling legislation in the Parliament. He has threatened to meet its attempted deployment in his province with violence. He believes that there is nothing wrong in PNG that Papua New Guineans can't solve themselves; hence, he concludes, the ECP is not necessary. He argues that it undermines the PNG Constitution. And he is concerned that deployment of foreign police, judges, and public servants in PNG will compromise the country's sovereignty.

Not a few politicians and public officials play down the rapidly mutating governance crisis in PNG. Like the Morobe Governor, they insist that things are not as bad as they seem. They are either naïve or disingenuous. The group's members are notorious for big-noting their governance capabilities, even when the evidence is against them – e.g., the 1997 Sandline affair (Dorney 1998). They fail to acknowledge that state failure is a real possibility in PNG and

they deny playing a role in bringing this about. Their opposition to the ECP might also reflect a growing unease about what may be unearthed if effective policing efforts are put in place to address issues of corruption in high places. Wenge's political grandstanding against the ECP may be a prelude to the last stand of the bigmen in PNG politics.

The loss of sovereignty argument is nonetheless troubling to thoughtful Papua New Guineans. As noted earlier, during the 2004 election campaign Prime Minister Howard restated his view that Australia has the right to make pre-emptive strikes against terrorist groups threatening Australian security and operating out of neighbouring states. Could this result in Australia over-riding PNG objections to preemptive or retaliatory action if terrorists (or international criminals) were operating out of PNG? As experiences in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq indicate, these actions inevitably cause civilian injuries and deaths and massive collateral damage.

This concern is compounded when questions are asked about accountability for Australian personnel deployed under the ECP agreement. Initially the ECP's implementation was delayed because of objections in PNG to demands for immunity for Australian officials from PNG law. Subsequently these demands were watered down, to apply only to certain "designated persons" (e.g., Australian judges and associated legal officials). In late October 2004 the PNG Ombudsman-General and a former Solicitor-General joined Governor Wenge in his action in the High Court to test the constitutionality of this arrangement. In particular, the Ombudsman-General is arguing that certain provisions in the ECP agreement undermine the powers of his office stipulated in the PNG Constitution and under the Organic Law on the Duties and Responsibilities of Leadership (Rheeney 2004). The outcome of this reference to the Court is still pending.[14]

But the issue of accountability remains a problem, not only for Luther Wenge and others, and not only on constitutional grounds. To whom will the Australian police and public servants ultimately be answerable? Who will determine their deployment and their responsibilities? Will it turn out like Australia's involvement in RAMSI, where important decisions are taken by interdepartmental committees in Canberra, with little or no consultation with the Solomon Islands Government? If this happens for PNG the ECP could develop into its shadow government. These concerns are gaining a heightened saliency with several political leaders declaring that, while

something like the ECP is unfortunately necessary, it is not yet a PNG-owned development with the kind of legitimacy that ownership should bring.

Some Papua New Guineans are uncomfortable with the complacency with which the Somare Government has facilitated the ECP. For much of 2004, the Government was preoccupied with a no-confidence motion in the Parliament. Controversially, it suspended Parliament for months at a time and engaged in some imaginative tactics to block the Opposition's attempts to get the no-confidence motion debated on the floor of the House. The Government's obsession with the politics of survival meant that the ECP was not exhaustively debated in the National Parliament. Nor did it receive the airing expected in public forums across the country. Nonetheless, it is well known that Sir Michael Somare held out against the ECP for some ten months. It was a coterie of "progressive" Ministers who finally won over the Cabinet and a reluctant Prime Minister.[15]

In PNG politics, five minutes can be a long time. Coalitions (grand and otherwise) rise and fall with the fickleness of a comic opera, though the policy consequences for ordinary Papua New Guineans are invariably negative. Nearly all of the post-independence PNG parliaments have been defiled by mendacious squabbles between would-be prime ministers and their venal backers. Time-honoured understandings of the public good and wise statesmanship are unwelcome strangers in these counterproductive wranglings. The reluctance of the Somare Government to develop a fully rounded case for a form of ECP – or something more far-reaching, that will significantly benefit PNG – is yet another example of how good public policy is routinely sacrificed to base politicking in the National Parliament.

Others fear that Australia may lack the will or the capacity to do the job properly. As former Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta, has noted:

> If effective, it [the ECP] will bite. Once it does bite, it is sure to encounter resistance. Institutional weaknesses are now so widespread that many players – up, down and across the system – benefit from the weakness, and will see no benefit in change. They will oppose change. (Morauta 2004)

Will this kind of opposition – which will surely intensify – see Australia backing off? (A similar political challenge is happening in the Solomons, to RAMSI.) Others wonder if Australia will get distracted along the way and quit before anything sustainable is achieved. This anxiety is not without substance given the unexpected circumstances surrounding Australia's precipitous "return" to the South Pacific. Just how whimsical has it all been? If the Bush administration sounds the charge again, will Australia go galloping off to a Battle for Taiwan, for example, or to a preemptive strike against North Korea, or to a war in Iran – withdrawing from its ECP commitments along the way?

Finally, there is growing resentment in Port Moresby about effects the ECP deployment is already having on everyday economic life. Even at this early stage in the program, some landlords have begun "rausing" bona fide tenants from houses and apartments in anticipation of higher rents from ECP personnel.[16] This is seen as a prelude to higher prices in other areas. Once again Sir Mekere Morauta's observations are apposite:

> [T]he distorting effects of the injection of 300 foreign workers into the community, all at once, should be recognized. The cost of rented accommodation in Port Moresby has sky rocketed and a chain reaction of shortage of rental accommodation is already being experienced. The Yacht Club will definitively overtake the Aviat as the Australian Cultural Centre, and a few other bars and restaurants will witness a temporary boom. Are these positive long-term benefits to the economy and people of Papua New Guinea? I doubt. (Morauta 2004: 21)

IX: CONCLUSION

It seems then that PNG has three choices. (i) It welcomes the ECP and cooperates with Australia on Australia's terms. Or (ii) it may be pressured into accepting the intervention on Australia's terms. Or (iii) it can seize the opportunities provided by the ECP to become very serious about how Australia is to be persuaded to address a PNG agenda as well as an Australian agenda.

The last choice is the most complex. It requires sophisticated thinking from Papua New Guinea's leaders and tough-minded diplomacy from its foreign affairs bureaucrats. As suggested earlier, there is not much evidence of sophistication or tough-mindedness, so far, in any of the debates in PNG about the ECP. It is time for the real ECP debate to begin. Never before has PNG's leadership been confronted with such a challenge.

That there is a need for something like an ECP is not seriously in question, whatever the

Luther Wenges of this world want us to believe. It is imperative that the proper development of an ECP-like arrangement be based on a sensitive, mutually respectful agreement, first between PNG and Australia, then with the other Pacific Island Forum states. This means conceiving far more sophisticated programs that are as much based on bottom-up considerations as they are on top-down schemes developed by remote Canberra bureaucrats.

At the same time, the state-making model informing the current ECP deployment needs substantial revision. Nothing less than a new state-making paradigm is required (see, e.g., Carment 2004; Fukuyama 2004). If contemporary statist thinking is not approached more creatively – i.e., if modern state structures themselves are not radically interrogated in relation to the conditions and needs of PNG and its peoples – no form of sustainable state-making can occur in PNG (or, for that matter, anywhere else in the South Pacific). It will be just more of the same: bumbling on amidst ramshackle institutions led by politicians and bureaucrats who lack the intellectual capacity and political will to make the necessary changes. A new paradigm can only be achieved if there is a wide and frank collaboration between policy makers and their advisers, NGOs, and academics – and above all, in close consultation with the men and women of PNG who live out their lives in mainly remote and harsh conditions and whose needs are therefore quite specific. As intimated earlier, it is starkly evident that there never has been a sustained, functioning state in large parts of PNG. State-making was never a serious part of the colonial and decolonizing processes anyway.

A new theoretical approach to nation-building is one thing; getting it all to work in practice is another. This will require a multilateralism that goes way beyond the current unilateral/bilateral ECP arrangements. While there are multilateral arrangements already in place that could be employed in a more comprehensive, generous and effective interventionism (e.g., the Pacific Islands Forum, APEC), there is a need to develop a more innovative culture of inter-regional and multilateral engagement that will legitimize the kinds of intervention now necessary to rescue many thousands of peoples from their weak and vulnerable states in the South Pacific. It is also time to make the Pacific Islands Forum more than a paper tiger – to give it real teeth, real claws, and a real roar. Without doubt Australia must play a leadership role in this development. However, Australia's capacities are limited. It cannot do all that needs to be done on its own.

Australia now has a golden opportunity – arguably one that is far more auspicious than FTAs with the USA, China, or selected Southeast Asian economies – to develop nuanced and effective niche diplomacy in the South Pacific, to lend gravitas to its hitherto airy claims to middle power status in global affairs. To achieve this, it needs to get its new interventionism in the South Pacific right. This means rethinking a great deal of the failed orthodoxy on states, state-making and failing states. And it means reconceiving the ECP as a wider and longer project, providing a sustained and reliable commitment to the region, and multilateralizing that commitment as widely as possible.

Effective niche diplomacy by Australia, in PNG and across the South Pacific, will have to be far more imaginative than the ECP in its present form – though it may yet prove to be a first, tentative step in this very worthwhile direction.

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ENDNOTES

[1] This is not to ignore some real success stories in PNG. Some examples were discussed at a conference jointly organized by DWU and the ANU in Madang in December 2004. The successes it revealed typically involved individuals and communities working independently or with outsiders (e.g., INGOs or AusAID), to cope with challenges thrown up by existing state inadequacies. While their very existence confirms problems in the post-colonial state in PNG, they nonetheless demonstrate that there are sub-state structures in place that could be mobilized in new forms of successful state-making.

[2] "Aspirational voters" are upwardly mobile citizens who invest heavily in material symbols of what they interpret to be their self-constructed success in the world (e.g., large houses, big cars, private schools for their children, luxury holidays, club memberships, personal fitness, dieting and life-style activities, soft porn private entertainment systems, etc.). More and Salecl note: "[N]ow self construction has become a cultural imperative in the West, and the emphasis is not on social determination, but on the individual project of self-making" (2004:19). The material symbols are needed by these voters as public expressions – hard evidence – of their "worth" in the self-making process. However, aspirationals' investments (or borrowings) make them vulnerable to interest-rate hikes, job insecurity, and other life crises. This produces a petty-bourgeois politics of highly anxious possessive individualism – or "neo-conservatism".

[3] Australians have only themselves to blame for bovinely standing by while governments run down Asian and Pacific studies curricula in schools and universities. The simple fact is that such curricula are vital to the future of the Australia's economy and security.

[4] Too many modern scholars exhibit reductive – even prejudiced – views of religious sentiments in contemporary societies around the world. The consequent theoretical and empirical weaknesses in their analyses are especially evident in the face of powerful forces linking religious sentiments to the politics of global dispossession. This is as true of those scholars' inadequate understandings of fundamentalisms in the West as it is of non-Western fundamentalisms – see, e.g., Samuel Huntington's opinionated yet influential "clash of civilizations" thesis (Huntington 1996). There is an urgent need for a renewal of comparative religion studies in the fraying fabric of late-modern social theory.

[5] For example: Eight out of ten Americans exit-polled after the 2004 Presidential election in November 2004 said they voted for President George W. Bush because of "moral [read: rightwing Christian] values". Some 42% of Americans share Bush's status as a "born again Christian". Many are avidly supportive of repealing abortion laws. Many of these people voted in 11 states to outlaw gay marriages. "The organized religious right, such as the Christian Coalition, takes credit for putting Bush back in the White House" (Gardels 2004). For a pioneering study of contemporary religious neo-conservatism in Australia see Maddox (2005). As in the USA and Australia, so in PNG (and throughout the South Pacific) there are marked political mobilizations of Christian fundamentalism. Some of these groups in PNG are preparing political organizations and identifying potential candidates to contest the 2007 general election.

[6] A small but telling illustration is recorded by Ian Downs: "The Currie report [1963] […] recommended the immediate establishment of an autonomous university in Papua and New Guinea and emphasized the commission's feeling of urgency by proposing a preliminary year in 1964. However […] it took the Barnes administration twelve months to publicly accept the need for a national university and another year to appoint an interim council. Those who advocated an autonomous university are agreed that, without the Foot report of 1962, higher education would have been limited, at best, to a college of the ANU in Canberra, perhaps Port Moresby". (Downs 1980:246)

[7] These included Michael Somare, Albert Maori Kiki, Tony Voutas, Moi Avei, John Momis, Rabbie Namaliu, and John Kaputin Some of the idealism of this period is captured in two autobiographies, *Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime* (Kiki 1968) and *Sana: An Autobiography* (Somare 1975). These, however, were products of the heroic past. There will be less to celebrate in future autobiographies, especially if they are truthful.

[8] Though as the ASPI report notes, it was also parsimonious, approximating the annual budget of one of Canberra's public hospitals (approximately $350 million per annum, about one third of the PNG Government's annual budget).

[9] Greg Urwin, a former diplomat with long standing experience and ties in the South Pacific.

[10] The EPG was chaired by Sir Julius Chan, a former PNG Prime Minister.

[11] A senior MP in PNG has expressed dismay at what he sees as a shift from the original ECP proposal, with "too many young Australian constables on the beat in Port Moresby". These are not the senior, experienced, mentoring officers the PNG Government was expecting. He believes there is too much duplicating

of what PNG police are already doing and too little of the planned capacity-building.

[12] For example, the National AIDS Council statistical officer, Agnes George, recently reported an increase in the HIV/AIDS infection rate among two to nine year old children, through "molesting of the victims and rape" (Lasibori 2005).

[13] This is *not* an implied criticism of AusAID which, to its credit, has stepped in and addressed many potential (and actual) crises in the past. AusAID's contributions to PNG over three decades of independence should not be underestimated, but should now be systematically and objectively analyzed. This is area of research that would especially benefit from contributions from PNG scholars.

[14] There is a general view – confirmed by a Minister and a senior MP – that if the Court upholds the Wenge complaint, the Parliament will facilitate a constitutional change to maintain the ECP arrangements. Apparently this strategy has cross-party backing.

[15] The Ministers were led by Foreign Minister Sir Rabbie Namaliu and included Petroleum and Energy Minister Sir Moi Avei, Treasurer Bart Philemon, former Communications Minister (now Minister for Lands) Dr Puka Tema, and Inter-Governmental Relations Minister Sir Peter Barter.

[16] One case involves an entire block of apartments, set high on concrete stilts, overlooking a beach in Port Moresby. The owners have been systematically moving out local and non-ECP tenants – a move to be completed by March 2005 – to make way for more ECP tenants. The intention is to make it an entirely ECP enclave. Some ECP personnel have already moved in and have fast become unpopular among their resentful neighbours for their loud parties and boisterous behavior around the complex's swimming pool / barbeque area. Rumours abound – but rumours can have negative consequences. The era of the Ugly Australian may be at hand in PNG – or it may be about to be indelibly reinforced.

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