



Media Release

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**East Timor and the Solomons -
we still have a lot to learn about state building**
Release of *Security Challenges* Volume 2 Number 2 July 2006

The Kokoda Foundation today released ***Security Challenges*** Volume 2 Number 2. This edition provides new insights into Australia's flawed efforts at rebuilding weak regional states, rethinking Australia's defence policy, cyber-threats to the Australian economy and Australia's intelligence support for foreign policies and strategies.

Anna Powles, a researcher at ANU, writes that the events of the last couple of months in both East Timor and the Solomons show that the efforts of Australia and its intervention partners have been seriously inadequate.

Ms Powles says that whilst one cannot – and should not - diminish the many positives of RAMSI in the Solomons, there has been a failure to gauge and respond to the real socio-political climate of both the Solomons and East Timor.

“The cautionary tale in this for Australia, New Zealand and the region more broadly is that it is critical we have a better understanding of context. This means putting the time and effort into understanding what is happening on the ground and accepting that externally-imposed solutions must be context-driven and context-based. Otherwise the same mistakes will continue to be made.”

“The problem is that the mission promised more and has not delivered,” said Ms Powles.

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Background

Ms Powles, in examining the state-building exercise in East Timor and the Solomons, says that simply imposing law and order does not equal long-term peace. She says that much deeper, and more sustained efforts are required to foster the internal dynamics for a lasting peace.

Capacity-building efforts in the local population and local institutions have often been weak and focused only on short-term service delivery.

Success of state-building efforts will only be achieved by substantive engagement with local populations – and this means all key groups. Australian and allied efforts, whilst generally well-meaning, have been less than completely successful.

Reconciliation between local factions, tribes and other groups of importance is critical to the success of nation-building. Temporarily suppressing or papering over deep-seated tensions and grievances simply defers problems. Better means of establishing and reinforcing true reconciliation are essential to success.

The burning of Chinatown and the rampaging through Honiara of clearly orchestrated groups caught RAMSI off guard and exposed the gulf that exists between the mission and the local population.

Finally, Ms Powles notes that the notion of templates and the transference of state building norms and practices from one post-conflict environment to the next fails to heed the fact that context is everything.

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