

Internal Conflict and Regional Security in Asia and the Pacific

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This paper examines the impact of increasing intra-state conflict in the Asia Pacific on domestic, regional and international security. It focuses on secessionist conflicts and self-determination disputes in South-East Asia and the South Pacific. It looks at the reasons behind the increase in such internal conflicts, including the proliferation of weak, ethnically diverse states; the impacts of modernization and democratization; and changing international norms in relation to the creation of new states. Finally, it examines the way that intra-state conflict impacts upon the international security agenda via the involvement of distant actors; the internationalization of domestic disputes; cross-border movements of arms and people; increasing threats to maritime transport; and the potential for increased superpower competition in the region.

Strategic perceptions of the major international security threats facing the Asia-Pacific region differ sharply on a subregional level, depending on whether the Pacific Ocean's northern or southern sphere is the region of focus. In North Asia, virtually all major security issues are viewed through the strategic lens of 'great power' politics, particularly the incipient rivalry between the US and China. As a consequence, security analysts tend to be preoccupied with problems of inter-state rivalry and possible conflict in the Taiwan Straits, the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea. Avoiding overt inter-state conflict over these issues is a predominant security concern not just for the Asia-Pacific region, but for the world.

However, when the focus shifts to the Pacific Ocean's southern sphere—particularly the South-East Asian and the South Pacific regions—the picture changes dramatically. There, the most pressing security issue facing both regional and international actors is not the threat of war between states, but rather the growing number of violent conflicts that take place within existing states. These various forms of *intra-state* conflict—secessionist movements, civil wars, communal violence, and so on—have become an increasing threat to political stability and state security in many countries.

This paper examines the regional and international security implications of increasing intra-state conflict in this region. It attempts to draw together two separate fields of political analysis—international relations, with its focus on international politics, and comparative politics, which is focused more on the domestic sphere—into a coherent dialogue. The paper begins by surveying the 'new' kinds of intra-state conflicts that have become so predominant around the world over the past decade. It surveys the range of such conflicts in the Asia Pacific, particularly in South-East Asia and the South Pacific. It then attempts to answer three basic questions: First, why have intra-state conflicts assumed such a level

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of prominence in recent years? Second, what kinds of conflict management devices need to be considered when dealing with this kind of conflict? Finally, what are the regional and international security implications of these conflicts for the Asia–Pacific region, and for the world?

Internal Conflicts

It has now become almost a truism to note that nearly all of today's violent conflicts are not wars between states but take place within countries. While there is debate about the extent to which this pattern is really new—globally, the total number of conflicts and conflict-related deaths are down substantially since the highs of the Cold War period¹—there is no doubt that the balance of armed conflict has shifted precipitously towards those which take place wholly or predominantly within existing states. For example, of the 110 'major armed conflicts' in the ten-year period between 1989 and 1999, only seven were traditional inter-state conflicts.² The remaining 103 took place within existing states. Such conflicts have beset many Asia Pacific states in recent years. According to one study, the Asia–Pacific region has both the highest incidence of ethnic conflict and the highest number of independent ethno-political groups involved in such struggles of any region in the world.³ Another study found that the Asia–Pacific had the largest number of 'major armed conflicts' of any region in every year between 1989 and 1997.⁴ With the exception of the ongoing India–Pakistan border clash (which itself has a significant internal dimension via the issue of self-determination in Kashmir), these were all intra-state conflicts.

Most of these internal conflicts appear, at first glance, to be based around communal, linguistic, religious or other kinds of 'ethnic' issues. For example, ethnic wars have been present throughout the last decade in countries like Indonesia, Burma, the Philippines, and Papua New Guinea. It is thus not surprising that James Kelly, the US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, has identified 'internal problems' as the 'greatest security challenge to South-East Asia'.⁵ In addition, over the past few years, the previously tranquil islands of the South Pacific have been beset by violent ethnic conflicts, which precipitated the overthrow of democratically elected regimes in both Fiji and the Solomon Islands in May 2000.

In many cases ethnic animosities, though real, are also convenient cloaks for mobilizing support around political and economic issues, such as control over resources, changing social relations, increasing group inequalities, and the tensions created when traditional lifestyles and power bases are confronted by the inexorable forces of modernization, urbanization and change. In addition, the highly intermixed and fragmented ethnic demography of much of South-East Asia—in contrast to the more homogeneous states of North Asia—creates its own problems, making international disputes out of domestic ones and greatly complicating territorial prescriptions for conflict management. As a result, almost

1 Ted Robert Gurr, 'Ethnic Warfare on the Wane', *Foreign Affairs*, 79,3 (2000), pp. 52–65.

2 Peter Wallensteen and Margareta Sollenberg, 'Armed Conflict, 1989–99', *Journal of Peace Research*, 37 (2000), pp. 635–649. A 'major armed conflict' is defined as one incurring over 1000 battle-related deaths in a conflict over government and/or territory.

3 Ted Robert Gurr, 'Peoples against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System', *International Studies Quarterly*, 38,3 (1994), pp. 349–353.

4 Margareta Sollenberg, Peter Wallensteen and Andrés Jato, 'Major Armed Conflicts', in Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 1999: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

5 'On the Sunny Side: Interview with James Kelly', *Far Eastern Economic Review* (9 August 2001), p. 20.

every country in maritime South-East Asia and the island Pacific is currently beset by some kind of self-determination dispute, most of which are based around ethno-regional quests for control of or secession from existing states.

A quick survey may highlight the plethora of self-determination claims and conflicts that are currently being fought over in the region:

- In *Burma*, the military junta have utilized a series of military ceasefire agreements and promises of regional autonomy to buy a short-term cessation of ethnic insurgencies from some 15 different groups in peripheral areas, while armed conflict continues with other ethnic groups such as the Karen.
- In *Malaysia*, there are ongoing disputes in the eastern provinces of Sabah and Sarawak, as well as growing threats from some of the northern sultanates for greater autonomy on religious matters and even for the establishment of an Islamic state.
- In the *Philippines*, the ongoing campaign for a Muslim homeland in the southern region of Mindanao, which has seen the establishment of an autonomous regional government, has nevertheless been beset by ongoing conflicts between hardliners and moderates, featuring ongoing guerilla war with the government, kidnapping of hostages, and brutal internal clashes.
- *East Timor* has emerged under United Nations auspices as a nation-in-waiting following the August 1999 vote on autonomy or independence, after several thousand people were killed and much of the country's infrastructure was destroyed by Indonesian-backed militias immediately following the independence vote.
- The region's largest state, *Indonesia*, is wracked by violent internal conflicts and self-determination disputes that threaten the very viability of the country itself. Indonesia's two most persistent internal conflicts in Aceh and West Papua (Irian Jaya), discussed later in this paper, both have a strong self-determination focus. The resource-rich, strongly Islamic province of Aceh, located in the northern part of Sumatra, has been waging an ongoing campaign for independence for decades. Unlike most of Indonesia's separatists, the Free Aceh Movement is well organized and well armed. Serious negotiations over greater autonomy are likely to be the only alternative to ongoing violence. A similar conclusion applies to West Papua, at the other end of the Indonesian archipelago, which has cultural and historical claims to kinship with neighbouring Papua New Guinea and to separate nationhood from Indonesia.

There have also been ongoing inter-ethnic problems and separatist claims in other Indonesian outer provinces such as Maluku, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Riau. Indeed, the ongoing Christian-Muslim conflict in Maluku is, on some indicators, the most deadly civil war taking place anywhere in the world today. Inter-communal violence in the province during the past two years has left over 5000 people dead and displaced roughly 500,000 more, with reports of forced religious conversions and human rights outrages.⁶

A further problem is tension between 'immigrant' and 'migrant' groups via internal migration in various regions (e.g. clashes between incoming Islamic groups and local Christians in Maluku; indigenous resistance to in-migrants from other Indonesian provinces in West Papua; Dyak attacks on Madurese migrants in Kalimantan; and so on).

- In the South Pacific, the long-running separatist struggle in *Papua New Guinea's* island province of Bougainville appears to have been resolved, in the short term at least, via a successful peace process (discussed later). But there remain periodic separatist

6 See International Crisis Group (ICG), *Indonesia: Overcoming Murder and Chaos in Maluku* (Jakarta/Brussels: ICG, 2000).

pressures in other parts of Papua New Guinea,⁷ in the *Solomon Islands* (where an uneasy peace deal negotiated in late 2000 has brought a fragile truce, but has also intensified calls for the separation of the western region), in *Fiji* (where the May 2000 coup led to calls for the separation of the western half of the main island from the traditional power centres in the east),⁸ and in the French overseas territory of *New Caledonia* (a society split between indigenous Kanaks in the island's north and French settlers in the south). Indeed, the prevalence of such separatist movements is one of the hallmarks of what I have called the 'Africanization' of the South Pacific.⁹

Why has there been such an explosion in internal conflicts in such a varied range of countries and contexts? While the causes of such events are clearly complex and multidimensional, several themes stand out when one examines the rash of self-determination, secessionist and other kinds of internal struggles in the region. Three of these are: the problems of weak and artificial state structures imposed on diverse and fragmented societies; the uncertain effects of modernization and democratization; and the changing nature of international norms regarding secessionism and the creation of new states.

Weak States, Many Societies

A fundamental problem facing the region is the weakness of many state structures in the face of resurgent regional, religious, and ethnic identities. Because the explosion of internal conflicts reflects, at least in part, the artificiality of some states and the salience of ethnicity, and because many intra-state conflicts are reflections of the ongoing strength of traditional society in the face of modern state structures, internal conflicts are particularly difficult to solve using conventional methods. The concept of a strong state is highly valued in most of Asia, and while some countries like Thailand and Cambodia have historical claims to 'stateness', many South-East Asian states and South Pacific states are among the more artificial creations of the 20th century. Some are more a product of colonialism and historical accident than any natural expression of underlying 'nations'. For example, the division between peninsular and eastern Malaysia is a product of British colonialism, as is the territorial manifestation of Burma. Indonesia, a country created by Dutch colonialism's amalgamation of sultanates and stateless tribes, has famously been described by Benedict Anderson as a country 'imagined' and hence invented by Javanese nationalists.¹⁰ Further east, in Papua New Guinea and other parts of Melanesia such as the Solomon Islands, the concept of a state is even more artificial: there, small, stateless traditional societies were aggregated for the purposes of international statehood into weak and impoverished modern states, some of which lack the capacity to fulfil such fundamental state tasks as tax collection or the delivery of basic services. In addition, in most such cases there is no dominant culture, as in Indonesia, but rather hundreds of languages and thousands of small clans and tribal groups.

This situation mirrors the problems of the wider region, particularly the so-called 'arc of instability'¹¹—the island chain of greater Indonesia and Melanesia, which is one of the

7 See 'Separatist Call in Chaotic Region', *Sydney Morning Herald* (22 September 2000).

8 See 'Poll Three Years Away, Says PM', *Sydney Morning Herald* (31 August 2000).

9 Ben Reilly, 'The 'Africanisation' of the South Pacific', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 54,3 (2000), pp. 261–268.

10 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

11 A term brought to prominence by Paul Dibb. See Paul Dibb, 'The Strategic Environment in the Asia-Pacific Region', in Robert D. Blackwill and Paul Dibb (eds), *America's Asian Alliances* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. 12.

most conflict-prone areas of the world today. The 'arc of instability' stretches from the strongly Islamic areas of Malaysia and northern Sumatra through to the Christian cultures of eastern Indonesia, East Timor and Melanesia. It encompasses eight archipelagic island states and related territories: Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji, plus the French territory of New Caledonia. Every one of these states, which range in size from some of the largest (Indonesia) to the smallest (Vanuatu) countries in the world, has faced or is currently facing self-determination movements and, in most cases, violent armed conflict.

Ethnically, this region is, quite simply, the most diverse area of the world. It encapsulates over 1000 languages and related ethnolinguistic groups, and an astonishing diversity of cultures and societies, including all of the world's four major religions. The region is also home to small but economically significant populations of the extensive Chinese and Indian diaspora communities, who control much of the private economy in countries like Indonesia (where the Chinese represent an economically privileged and resented minority) and Fiji (where a coup in May 2000 ousted the country's first ethnic Indian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry). These communities tend to suffer periodic victimization in times of political upheaval—such as the 1998 anti-Chinese riots in Jakarta that left hundreds of ethnic Chinese dead, maimed or raped. This presents at least the potential for external powers like China to become involved in the region to support their ethnic kin populations.¹²

The historical context of many countries also creates difficulties in addressing contemporary conflicts. One example is Indonesia's colonial origins as the former Dutch East Indies, under which quasi-independent sultanates and stateless communities alike were forcibly incorporated into one unwieldy unitary state. Accordingly, there is today considerable pressure within Indonesia to move away from its unitary structure towards a more decentralized or even federal model, and to grant 'special autonomy' to rebellious outer provinces like Aceh and West Papua. But critics argue that to make such concessions will only assist those wanting to break away and, combined with the independence of the disputed former province of East Timor, may serve to fragment the country. Regional governments have openly discussed the possible 'Balkanization' of Indonesia.¹³

While this kind of language suggests that the state could implode from within, in reality the main prospect for secessionism in Indonesia is a product of centre–periphery tensions, particularly ongoing secessionist struggles in the two most peripheral provinces—Aceh in the west and West Papua in the east—to separate from the Javanese-dominated centre. Centre–periphery tensions are also prominent in Malaysia (particularly in the eastern states of Sabah and Sarawak), in the Philippines (in the Cordilleras and Mindanao), and even in Thailand (which as a democracy has handled insurgency threats much better, but nonetheless faces ongoing tensions in its Muslim regions of the south and on its borders with Burma and Laos). The centre–periphery issue was also a prominent aspect of the long-running Bougainville conflict in Papua New Guinea. In each case, the peripheral regions see themselves as being ethnically, religiously and linguistically separate from the dominant culture of the centre. Significant resource endowments—such as the giant Freeport mine in West Papua—are also an important factor.

Modernization and Democratization

Many countries in the Asia–Pacific region are in the throes of enormous social, economic and political change, from tradition to modernity and from authoritarian rule to democracy.

12 See Daojiong Zha, 'China and the May 1998 Riots of Indonesia: Exploring the Issues', *The Pacific Review*, 13,4 (2000), pp. 557–575.

13 See 'Australia Warns Jakarta over Papuans' Rights', *Sydney Morning Herald* (6 November 2000), p. 1.

This process is itself conflict creating. One of the great failures of the modernization paradigm of economic and political development that dominated academic thinking about non-Western countries in the 1960s and 1970s was the expectation that primordial, ‘backward’ traditional allegiances to clan, tribe and region would gradually wither away as modernization proceeded, to be replaced by new forms of identity such as class interests. In reality, modernization almost everywhere led not to a withering away but rather a reformulation and strengthening of ethnic, linguistic, religious and other kinds of group identity, in part as a reaction to the pace of change and social upheavals. In addition, because economic modernization created winners and losers, traditional allegiances have provided a way of mobilizing coalitions of common interest to be part of the winning side—for example, in competition for scarce natural or economic resources. In the political arena also, ethnic identities have proved to be a potent means of mobilizing group populations behind a common cause.

Today, scholars and policymakers sometimes suffer from a blindness similar to that of modernization theorists when they expect that democratic governance will naturally lead to peaceful communal relations and lower levels of conflict—the so-called ‘democratic peace’ thesis much cited in speeches by former US President Bill Clinton during his term in office.¹⁴ In fact, while long-term democracies are, on average, less likely to experience high degrees of internal conflict and much less likely to go to war with each other than their authoritarian counterparts, countries undergoing the wrenching process of *democratization* are not.¹⁵ Many indicators of conflict—both inter- and intra-state varieties—tend to *rise* in the initial period of democratization. One of the weaknesses of rapid democratization in multi-ethnic states is thus the likely outbreak of ethnically based self-determination and secessionist movements.¹⁶ This phenomenon has been evident in a number of new or emerging Asia-Pacific democracies, where disaffected groups claiming self-determination and/or independence as a fundamental aim have tended to take up arms to support their cause. Thus, within the putatively ‘democratic’ states of the region, minorities have often eschewed the ballot box as a route to self-determination, choosing the force of arms instead. Tamils in Sri Lanka, Kashmiris in India, the Jammu peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, the Moros in the Philippines, and Bougainvilleans in Papua New Guinea all fall into this category. Similarly, some of the internal conflicts and secessionist movements in Indonesia, a country engaged in the difficult process of transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, have been prompted not just by the successful (if bloody) separation of East Timor, but also by the ongoing democratization of national politics.

Across South-East Asia—a region that only ten years ago was dominated by repressive and authoritarian governments—there is now a clear trend towards democratic governance as a new norm.¹⁷ The primacy of democracy as a form of government is now established in Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia—three of the four biggest countries in ASEAN. This has dramatically altered prospects for the management of self-determination and other kinds of internal conflict—for example, via democratic compromise and accommodation, rather than the repressive responses that typify authoritarian regimes. But this same process

14 See Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

15 Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, ‘Democratization and the Danger of War’, *International Security*, 20,1 (1995), pp. 5–38.

16 See Renée de Nevers, ‘Democratization and Ethnic Conflict’, in Michael Brown (ed.), *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

17 See Ben Reilly, ‘Regionalism and the Spread of Democracy in the Asia Pacific’, in Bert Edström (ed.), *Interdependence in the Asia Pacific* (Stockholm: Swedish Institute for International Affairs and Center for Pacific Asia Studies, 2001).

of democratization is also sowing the seeds for ongoing internal conflicts and the possible break-up of some countries that were previously held together by force. This is because the logic of democratization is also the logic of self-determination: both are based on the idea of people freely choosing their political status and form of government, of basic freedoms of movement, speech and assembly, as well as the freedom of journalists to report on events. Such reforms have enabled independence movements to gain a level of exposure and organization that simply was not possible under authoritarian rule. As a result, the democratization of countries like Indonesia—which started with the fall of former President Soeharto in 1998 and the June 1999 elections that brought President Abdurrahman Wahid to power, and was strengthened in August 2001 by the peaceful and constitutional transfer of power to Megawati Sukarnoputri—has also contributed to the push for secession by some regions. As the world's fourth-largest country, with a population of 220 million people, Indonesia remains the lynchpin of the South-East Asian region, and of broader regional security. But, particularly since the fall of former President Soeharto in 1998 and the beginning of a transition towards democracy, it has also become a highly unstable country. It may thus be the case that Indonesia can maintain either its fledgling democracy or its existing territorial structure—but not both.

Changing International Norms

Another force driving the new prominence of internal conflicts—particularly demands for self-determination—is a perceived change in international norms regarding secessionism and the creation of new states. The US political scientist Samuel Huntington once remarked that the 20th-century bias against political divorce—that is, secession—was just about as strong as the 19th-century bias against marital divorce.¹⁸ If that is the case, then the 21st-century attitude to secession may follow the relaxation of prevailing norms against marital divorce that occurred over the course of the 20th century. Today, the constraints that the international community puts against the creation of new states are, though strong, also less prohibitive than they were for most of the 20th century, particularly the Cold War period. Indeed, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, dozens of new states have been created around the world. Most of these have come from the dissolution of the Soviet empire. But there have also been new states created by a process of mutual separation, as in the 'Velvet Divorce' between the Czech Republic and Slovakia; by war, as in the separation of Ethiopia and Eritrea; by a combination of the two, as in the former Yugoslavia; and by direct international intervention, as in the case of East Timor.

Despite its regional prominence, the East Timor conflict in many ways was and is a special case. It had a separate colonial history from the rest of Indonesia as a (neglected) Portuguese colony, and its 1975 invasion and incorporation into Indonesia was never recognized by the United Nations or most of the international community (although it was formally accepted by Australia). Because of this, East Timor assumed the status for the international community of an unresolved issue of decolonization and self-determination. There are few if any other conflicts in the region with such a status, although the West Papuans are attempting to draw parallels with their case (see below). Indeed, it is a measure of how important international support has become for the prospects of successful secession that activists from the region's two most persistent conflicts in Aceh and West Papua have both been assiduously trying to internationalize their conflicts—Aceh in the Islamic world, particularly among some of the wealthy states of the Middle East, and West Papua at the

18 Samuel P. Huntington, 'Foreword', in Eric A. Nordlinger, *Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies* (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1972).

Pacific Islands Forum and in The Netherlands, where a legal challenge to the province's incorporation into Indonesia is now underway.¹⁹

However, the stark reality is that most self-determination claims in the region are unlikely to be recognized or supported by the broader international community. Indeed, as noted above, many of the region's self-determination demands are often proxies for other issues such as a redistribution of economic power as much as quests for genuine political self-determination. There are one or two cases, however, which potentially have the necessary mixture of historical grievance, clear identity differences from the majority community, and a sharp perception of group deprivation and domination by an external power, that may conceivably justify a claim for independent statehood. These cases have the greatest potential to become genuine issues of international involvement and to create new states out of existing ones.

Although the creation of new states is not a likely occurrence in either case, it is possible that two of the conflicts mentioned earlier—Bougainville and West Papua—could, in time, reach this conclusion. This is particularly important for Australia, which would be expected to play a leading role in both cases because of its proximity to New Guinea. In jurisdictional terms, the island of New Guinea is artificially split in two by a straight line drawn on a map in Europe in 1848, which carved up the island between the governments of The Netherlands, Britain and Germany. Thus the current international border splits the island between two states—Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. This border, which was drawn without any regard for social realities, has had the effect of dividing tribes—and sometimes even villages—in two: on the eastern side, they are members of the independent Pacific state of Papua New Guinea, whose outer island province of Bougainville has made claims of affinity with the neighbouring Solomon Islands, while in the west lies the Indonesian province of West Papua, formerly Irian Jaya.

Bougainville

The most serious security issue in the Pacific island region in the 1990s, the Bougainville conflict, centred around demands for Bougainville's independence made by rebel groups such as the Bougainville Revolutionary Army, a demand opposed not only by the Papua New Guinea government but also many Bougainvilleans. Before the conflict began, Bougainville's substantial contribution to the national economy was disproportionate to its small size and population, mainly due to the enormous open cut copper, gold and silver mine at Panguna in the central mountains of the main island from 1972 until the conflict caused its closure in 1989.

A series of increasingly violent clashes between government forces and the various pro-and anti-independence militias came to a head in 1997, when the Papua New Guinea government commissioned an international mercenary service, Executive Outcomes, to attack the rebels. In a surprise move, the Papua New Guinean army's chief commander announced the refusal of his forces to work with the mercenaries, who were ejected from the country. Prime Minister Julius Chan and two key ministers involved in engaging the mercenaries were forced to stand down. These events helped create the conditions conducive to the remarkable progress towards conflict resolution which occurred in the latter part of the 1990s. Taking advantage of that changed position at the national level, rebel forces began to make direct contact with the central government. Further developments resulted in the New Zealand government facilitating talks between the Bougainvillean leaders. These talks resulted in a ceasefire agreement, followed by the deployment of an

19 'West Papua Separatists Prepare to Fight in Court', *Sydney Morning Herald* (9 August 2001).

unarmed 'Peace Monitoring Group', led by Australia, on the island, accompanied by a UN observer team.

Since then, successive agreements—notably the so-called the 'Loloata Understanding' of March 2000 and the Bougainville Peace Agreement signed at Arawa in August 2001—have paved the way for a self-determination referendum on Bougainville's political status to be held at some unspecified time in the future, after an extended period of autonomy from the central government. Whether a referendum can actually be conducted in the deeply divided post-conflict situation of Bougainville and whether the various disputants will accept the result remains to be seen. However, the commitment to hold and recognize the results of the referendum has been affirmed by Australia, which previously opposed any such step that could lead to independence. This deal has encouraged separatists in West Papua, the western part of the island of New Guinea.

West Papua

The West Papua dispute also centres around its demands for independence, this time from Indonesia. Even today, few people realize how bizarre the incorporation of West Papua into Indonesia actually was. In 1949, when Indonesia gained full independence from The Netherlands, it attempted to claim the neighbouring Dutch territory of West Papua (then called Netherlands New Guinea) as well, on the grounds that the new nation of Indonesia comprised the entire territory formerly under Dutch colonial rule. The Netherlands, however, opposed this, arguing that the territory had been administered separately from and had nothing in common with Indonesia, peopled as it was by hundreds of small Melanesian tribes. Instead, the Dutch vowed to retain their colonial presence in West Papua and, with the Australian government, agreed to bring about its independence as a phased transition that would proceed in cooperation with moves towards self-determination in the island's other half—the neighbouring Australian territory of Papua New Guinea. In 1961, local politicians established a West Papuan Council, and set 1970 as the date for West Papuan independence. In response to this, Indonesia, under the control of nationalist President Sukarno, sent an 'advance force' of some 1419 soldiers into the territory. What had been a minor regional issue took on the very real possibility of war between The Netherlands and Indonesia, with Australia inevitably becoming involved.

This elevation of the West Papua issue into an international dispute saw the self-determination of the territory assume a Cold War significance as well. In the United States, concern about communism in Vietnam and the possible threat of further communist expansion in South-East Asia meant that supporting anti-communist governments like Indonesia's was an over-arching US foreign policy priority. To this end, President John F. Kennedy pressured The Netherlands and Australia to cease their plans for West Papuan independence and, in the secret negotiations that followed, essentially offered West Papua to Indonesia. As a fig leaf of legitimacy, the deal signed between the Indonesian and Dutch governments in New York in 1962 ratifying this arrangement included a proviso on self-determination. It was agreed that a UN-administered 'Act of Free Choice' would be held in the territory, in which the West Papuan people themselves could decide to remain with Indonesia or be independent. As part of this deal, in May 1963, Indonesia became the administering power-in-waiting of the territory, which was renamed Irian Jaya.

1969 saw the long-awaited 'Act of Free Choice'—not as a free vote of the West Papuan people, but as a staged event that became widely known as the 'Act *Free of Choice*'. No self-determination plebiscite was ever held. Instead, a total of 1026 selected West Papuan representatives, handpicked in advance by Indonesian forces, voted on behalf of their country's total population of some one million people. Indonesian officials

organized and controlled the whole process. In one of the sorriest events in its history, the United Nations, whose officials were not even present for most of the elections, then approved what was a unanimous vote on the part of these hand-picked representatives for incorporation into Indonesia—even though, as recently released archives show, UN officials acknowledged at the time that the whole process was a stage-managed and empty act. Indeed, there is no escaping the conclusion that the United Nations, under pressure from the United States and Indonesian governments, actively collaborated with Indonesia to ensure that a free vote for the West Papuans did not take place.²⁰

As this history suggests, the West Papua situation has several superficial parallels with East Timor. Like East Timor, West Papua had a separate status from the rest of the Dutch East Indies following the emergence of modern Indonesia, being separately administered by the Dutch as a racially, linguistically and religiously distinct territory. More so than East Timor, West Papua is also geographically and culturally distinct from the rest of Indonesia. In addition, an ongoing guerilla movement, the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM), has opposed Indonesian occupation since 1961. No reliable casualty figures for this 40-year low-level war exist, but even conservative estimates are of thousands of deaths, mostly of West Papuans at the hands of the Indonesian military. More recently, since the East Timor referendum, the West Papua issue has taken a dramatic turn, as independence leaders attempt to seize what they see as a historic opportunity to have the West Papua issue revisited. Assemblies of West Papuan representatives have been convened and an independence flag has been raised. Two regional states—Vanuatu and Nauru—have taken up the West Papuan cause at the United Nations and regional forums like the Pacific Island Forum. In December 1999, the Dutch government announced that they would re-examine the historical circumstances surrounding the Act of Free Choice. With such increasing international exposure, it is almost inevitable that West Papua's status will again become a subject of international concern, just as it was 40 years ago.

Conflict Management for Intra-state Conflicts

Internal conflicts—particularly ethnic conflicts—are notoriously difficult to solve using conventional measures. Because of the deep-seated nature of ethnic identities, they are particularly unsuited to cake-cutting, split-the-difference solutions. They also tend to be immune to traditional approaches to international security, based on international law, diplomacy, and inter-governmental organizations. Such institutions were designed for the maintenance of international, inter-state peace and order, and are often impotent or irrelevant in the face of internal conflicts, which are focused at the domestic level usually and involve non-negotiable claims to separate statehood. Similarly, the existing international architecture of world governance, in the shape of the United Nations, is founded on the assumption that states are the basic unit of international order and not, as so many of the Asia-Pacific's conflicts suggest, artificial and ephemeral creations of colonialism and circumstance.

For the same reason, intra-state conflicts also present problems for those attempting to resolve disputes via traditional remedies such as 'preventive diplomacy', 'early warning' and 'international intervention'. These paradigms have so far had little real impact upon contemporary intra-state conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region, most of which are not amenable to international involvement (in part because such involvement conflicts with the paradigm of state sovereignty) and do not, except in unusual circumstances like East Timor, attract direct international intervention. Especially in Asia, most countries are likely to

20 John Saltford, 'United Nations Involvement with the Act of Self-Determination in West Irian (Indonesian West New Guinea) 1968 to 1969', *Indonesia* (April 2000), pp. 71–92.

oppose even benign attempts at what are seen as external interference in their internal affairs, just as they will resist demands for self-determination which involve a redefinition of their existing territorial boundaries.

In addition, some of the region's most savage conflicts—the Christian–Muslim clashes in Ambon and northern Maluku, for instance—barely make the international news media. For most of the world, the Pacific islands are even more obscure, and their strategic importance is extremely limited. This has serious implications for potential international intervention in intra-state conflicts. Take, for example, the slide into civil war in the Solomon Islands, which had been a functioning democracy since its emergence as an independent state in 1978. When ethnic tension began to escalate in 1998 between residents of Guadalcanal and settlers from the adjacent island of Malaita, the country moved rapidly from a state of ethnic tensions to a virtual civil war. In June 2000, Prime Minister Bartholomew Ulufa'alu was taken hostage by Malaitan rebels, who demanded, and received, his resignation. With the capital under the control of a militia force and a democratically elected government deposed by force, the immediate response from the Solomon Islands government, or what was left of it, was to ask for external military assistance to restore peace. These requests were ignored, both by regional powers such as Australia and New Zealand and also by the United Nations. Despite the pleas of the Solomon Islands representative in New York, neither the General Assembly nor the Security Council would discuss the crisis—primarily because there was no one willing to raise and sponsor such a discussion. To do so would inevitably have led to the expectation that, if any external assistance was authorized, it would be Australia and New Zealand—the only developed countries with strategic interests in the islands—that would be responsible for any intervention. The governments of both countries had already made it clear that this was not something they were prepared to countenance. So there the matter lapsed, along with the elected government of the Solomon Islands. However, in October 2000 the Australian and New Zealand governments, with support from the Commonwealth Secretariat, did facilitate a peace process, the Townsville Peace Agreement, which has provided a shaky but to date enduring end to hostilities via an unarmed international peace monitor mission, the Truce Monitoring Group. In December 2001, a new government was installed after national elections, funded by the international community, were held.

Despite this international dimension, cases like the Solomon Islands underscore the basic reality that solutions to internal conflicts must be based on internal reforms rather than external intervention. External actors can assist, guide and pressure, but they cannot solve a conflict themselves. How then can such internal conflicts be managed or accommodated peacefully? One possible approach lies in designing political institutions that can effectively diffuse, reduce or reshape conflicts. Because so many of the region's political institutions now have the potential for redesign and reform, due to ongoing democratization and the recognition of the weakness of transplanted political systems across the region, the restructuring of internal political systems to accommodate the realities of social diversity is a priority. The confluence of increasing democratization and increasing internal conflict has naturally placed renewed emphasis on the capacity of countries' internal political institutions as mechanisms for managing conflicts. So far, most of these institutions have been found wanting. Three broad areas of institutional design have received particular attention:

- the territorial structure of the state (that is questions of federalism, autonomy, confederation and the like);
- the form of the state's legislative and executive functions (particularly the question of whether a presidential or parliamentary form of government is most appropriate, or whether 'semi-presidential' structures may work best); and

- the nature and structure of a state's rules of political representation (particularly the question of electoral systems, laws governing political parties, and alternative forms of local-level representation).

These domestic political institutions are increasingly central to the debate about state security and survival in the region. For example, the issue of parliamentary versus presidential government, and the balance of forces between the legislature and the executive, was a key political dispute in Indonesia during the two-year presidency and subsequent impeachment of Abdurrahman Wahid. Similarly, Indonesia's ongoing process of decentralization of power to the local government (*kapupatem*) level represents a major experiment in devolution which will inevitably impact on the capacity of the Indonesian state to manage many processes, including conflict prevention. Likewise, the provision of 'special autonomy' for Aceh and West Papua in Indonesia, for Mindanao in the Philippines, and for Bougainville in Papua New Guinea is central to prospects for peace building in those regions. Discussions of electoral system reform are also prominent in many countries, including Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Fiji. In each case, accommodation of diversity and management of conflict is central to the broader debate about the design of institutions.

Beyond such major constitutional issues, there are also a host of 'extra-constitutional' institutions and policies that require attention from those seeking solutions to intra-state conflicts. These include:

- measures to combat the proliferation of small arms
- policies to reintegrate former combatants
- the promotion of local peace accords
- social and economic pacts between contending elites
- truth, reconciliation and justice commissions
- the formation of civic 'peace committees'
- changes in language and education policy
- minority rights instruments, indigenous group bodies, gender commissions, and so on.

All of these devices, and others, have the potential to address and ameliorate conflicts in the region.²¹ But so far only a few of them have been seriously investigated as options for peace building—and often, as in the case of weapons demobilization in the Solomon Islands, only after the initial conflict has already occurred. A greater emphasis on these institutional process of state building and governance will inevitably become more important as states are forced to grapple with the vexed issue of their own internal restructuring—or fall apart in the attempt.

Internal Conflict and the Regional and International Security Agenda

In the past, regional security and internal conflict were usually seen as separate issues. However, there are clear—and increasing—regional and international security implications arising from the explosion of intra-state conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region. In fact, most of the region's internal conflicts have an international dimension. Artificial colonial boundaries dividing culturally kin groups between states are one recurring problem and, combined with the ease of movement and open borders that characterize much of the region, emphasize the impossibility of quarantining the internal and external dimensions of

21 For a survey of these 'constitutional' and 'extra-constitutional' options, see Peter Harris and Ben Reilly (eds), *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiators* (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 1998).

regional security. Manifestations of this are the increasing cross-border links between West Papuan rebels and the neighbouring (and culturally kin) state of Papua New Guinea; between East and West Timor; and between separate fundamentalist Islamic movements operating in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, as well as distant actors from outside the region, such as the Middle East.

One example of this latter link is the incendiary effect of Islamic extremists like Indonesia's Laskar Jihad (Holy War Taskforce) in fomenting the ongoing Christian–Muslim conflict in Maluku. Following the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States, links between Osama bin Laden's terrorist network and fundamentalist groups in Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Singapore have also been reported.²² There are even cross-cultural connections, as evidenced by revelations of West Papuan OPM forces being trained by the Communist New People's Army in the Philippines.²³ The proposal for a 'West Pacific Forum'—comprising Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand and possibly the Philippines—advanced by former Indonesian President Wahid in 1999 was partly a response to these cross-border security concerns.²⁴

The region's political geography—particularly the maritime context of 'island Asia'—also has direct international security implications. The open nature of maritime borders, and the ease of movement across them, has direct implications for the internationalization of separatist movements. For example, the kidnapping of tourists from a Malaysian beach resort in 1999 by Philippine Moro rebels, and their rapid transportation by boat to the southern Philippines, was made possible in part by the ease of movement across international waters that the region's 'inland seas' provide. The steady supply of arms to Islamic *jihad* organizations operating in the Indonesian province of Maluku from rebel groups in the southern Philippines has been facilitated by the same factor.

In addition, recent studies of piracy in South East Asia—which has by far the highest incidence of attacks on commercial shipping in the world—have found a link between the rate of pirate attacks and the presence of separatist movements, particularly in the southern Philippines and east Malaysian regions.²⁵ The first six months of 2001 had the highest incidences of piracy internationally yet recorded, with a concentration in Indonesian and Malaysian waters. The increasing incidence of self-determination and secessionist movements in the region is thus directly linked to increasing risks of piracy and other attacks on commercial shipping.

The region sits astride some of the world's most important sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) and trade, particularly the vitally important Straits of Malacca between Singapore and Indonesia off the east coast of Aceh, which is a major maritime conduit for international shipping between the Europe, the Middle East, China, Japan and the United States. In September 2001, the Free Aceh Movement warned that ships using the Malacca Straits should 'seek permission' from the separatist group before using the straits, and that they would not be responsible for attacks on vessels that failed to do so.²⁶ If pursued, this threat would throw the Aceh conflict to the forefront of international security concerns.

The Malacca Straits constitute one of a number of strategic choke points controlling access to both the Indian and Pacific Oceans which are affected by regional separatist disputes. In addition, the contentious South China Sea region is the subject of numerous overlapping territorial claims by China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia.

22 See 'For Megawati, It's a Muslim Question', *Australian Financial Review* (19 September 2001).

23 See 'Freedom Forces Find Strength in New Unity of Purpose', *Sydney Morning Herald* (14 March 2001).

24 See 'Wahid Backs West Pacific Union', *Australian Financial Review* (23 March 2001).

25 Jason Abbot and Neil Renwick, 'Pirates? Maritime Piracy and Societal Security in Southeast Asia', *Pacific Review*, 11,1 (1999), pp. 7–24.

26 See 'Malacca Stand-off', *Australian Financial Review* (6 September 2001).

Overall, some 40 per cent of the world's seaborne trade passes through South-East Asian waters, and many of the region's SLOCs are directly affected by local-level conflicts. As one scholar notes, 'the end of the Cold War has not removed the threat to the SLOCs. While many threats exist (collision, piracy etc), the most problematic is still the threat of war and regional instability. Now, however, the threat ... comes more from the indirect threat of regional instability rather than from the threat of a direct attack.'²⁷

Beyond the region, intra-state conflicts can also have wider implications for great-power relations, particularly as current regional hegemon withdraw and weak states look to other external actors for financial and military assistance. Over the past two decades, for example, aid from the United States to much of South-East Asia and the Pacific has declined sharply, while Japan has become the largest aid donor. China and Taiwan are also significant players in some countries, particularly in the South Pacific, where the increasing activity and tension between the two in their bids for diplomatic recognition and allegiance from a number of small island states has the potential to internationalize the region's current problems. Over the past decade, both the Chinese and Taiwanese governments have been involved in an increasingly fraught bidding war for diplomatic recognition by South Pacific governments. At the latest count, five states—the Solomon Islands, the Marshall Islands, Palau, Nauru and Tuvalu—have granted diplomatic recognition to Taiwan against China. For this, they have received tens of millions of dollars in aid and related inducements. More recently, the stakes of this bidding war were raised by the implosion of the Solomon Islands, enabling China to make a rival bid to members of the remnant government with promises of a better financial deal.²⁸

Beneath the surface of this vaguely comic game of diplomatic pingpong, however, is the longer-term trend of new players stepping into the economic and security vacuum left by disengaging Western powers and, in some cases, attempting to take on the role of regional hegemon. In the Solomon Islands and a number of other island Pacific countries, for example, the very weakness of states, their economic fragility, and the declining interest of Western donors all offer avenues for rising powers like China to increase their influence. In 1997, for example, the Chinese government was able to establish a military-run satellite-tracking facility on the small Micronesian island atoll of Kiribati—the real purpose of which, according to some analysts, is to monitor the US military base in the Marshall Islands to the north and to track similar exercises on Taiwan.²⁹ Whatever its true purpose, the mere fact that China operates a military facility on the sovereign territory of a member of the Pacific Island Forum should be seen as a harbinger of future trends.³⁰ China has also built the government offices in Samoa and the parliament in Vanuatu, has given a ferry to Kiribati and cargo boats to Micronesia, and is assisting the regular military forces in Fiji, Tonga and Papua New Guinea, where it has also agreed to build the new foreign ministry.³¹

This type of behaviour raises many longer-term issues about the confluence between internal conflict, regional security, and the future international security landscape. The clearest lesson for policymakers is the increasing link between local/domestic and regional/international security, and the importance of even small states in a new century that appears to be defined, like the last one, by ongoing superpower rivalry and competition for control

27 Donna J. Nincic, 'From Sea-Lanes to Global Cities: The Policy Relevance of Political Geography', in Miroslav Nincic and Joseph Lepgold (eds), *Being Useful: Policy Relevance and International Relations Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 307.

28 'Wandering Solomons Envoy Faces the Sack', *Sydney Morning Herald* (13 October 2000).

29 See 'Pacific Outpost: China's Satellite Station in Kiribati Has Military Uses', *Far Eastern Economic Review* (30 April 1998).

30 See 'The Mystery of Kiribati', *The Dominion* (27 August 1999).

31 See 'How to Win Friends ...', *Time* (4 June 2001).

of the Pacific Ocean. In short, it is no longer possible—if it ever was—to separate international security from domestic, intra-state issues such as internal conflict, governance, and state capacity. Indeed, as the increasing prominence of intra-state conflict in the Asia Pacific makes clear, what appear to be localized disputes about self-determination and domestic politics can have major long-term implications for the changing balance of international security.