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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHDC IMMEDIATE classificati

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WELLINGTON 000406

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12958: DECL: 05/25/2015 TAGS: PGOV, PREL, NZ SUBJECT: NZ UP

DATE ON THE SOLOMONS REF: WELLINGTON 298 Classified By: DCM

David R

Burnett, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1

(C) Summary: GNZ officials report that a May 19 meeting between New Zealand Foreign Minister Peters, Australian Foreign Minister Downer, and Solomon Island officials was "difficult." However, the Solomons PM was much more conciliatory during a separate meeting with Peters on May 23

Most Solomon Islanders seem to support RAMSI, but GNZ thinks more needs to be done to educate the local population about RAMSI's work

NZ officials believe PM Sogavare is in a difficult position, and they are trying to deliver a firm message without making things hard for the moderates in his Cabinet

Meanwhile, NZDF predicts a NZ platoon will be in the Solomons at least until the end of the year, although NZ police should be down to pre-election levels by mid-June

End Summary

2

(C) Peters and Downers had actually scheduled their visit to the Solomons about two months ago, presuming this would be a good time to meet the new government

The timing had been changed slightly to May 19, not because of the recent unrest in the Solomons (reftel), but because of Peters desire to be present in Parliament when the Government unveiled its budget on May 18. When the visit was originally planned, Peters had intended to stay in the Solomons a day longer than Downer, who left after a day. However, the budget-related change meant that Peters missed the return commercial flight so he stayed on until May 22.

During the three-day solo visit, in addition to the second meeting with Sogavare Peters met with the Foreign Minister, Governor General, and Opposition leader.

He also visited Western Province and Malaita.

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(C) Marion Crawshaw, an NZ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) official who accompanied Peters, told Pol-Econ Couns that Solomons PM Sogavare was a lot more tempered in his remarks during his May 22 meeting with Peters than he had been in a larger meeting with Australian FM Downer, Solomons FM Patteson Oti and others just three days before. Crawshaw, who is Director of MFAT's Bilateral Pacific Division believes this is because Oti was not at the second meeting.

RAMSI principals who had met with Sogavare had found him similarly constructive, she said, but found it had been hard to get the meeting via Oti.

She said whereas

at the first meeting PM Sogavare and FM Oti had talked about the need for a RAMSI exit strategy, when Sogavare met with Peters alone he said "exit strategy" meant that RAMSI would leave one day, once its job was done.

4

(C) GNZ officials actually have some sympathy for Sogavare, Crawshaw said.

He is under a fair amount of pressure from the moderates in the Cabinet, but also needs the votes of both Ministers who are in prison (Charles Dausabea and Nelson Ne'e) to stay in power.

Although others in GNZ consider Sogavare to be corrupt, Crawshaw says she has seen no evidence that he is "seriously in the till," although she added that it seems no Solomons politician is completely honest.

Rather, she believes the PM's biggest problem is that he very much wants to be Prime Minister and is willing to ally with some very dishonest people to hold onto the post.

Crawshaw says that during a five minute one-on-one with Peters on the margins of their meeting, Sogavare apparently said that he was relying on RAMSI, Australia, and New Zealand "to give us sanity." 5

(C) For this reason, GNZ and the Australians are working through how to provide some tough messages to the Solomons while at the same time suppo

ring the moderates in the Cabinet around Sogavare Crawshaw said that during Peters' meetings and tour of the Solomons, people were generally supportive of RAMSI

However they, and even PM Sogavare seem unaware of all the work that RAMSI is actually doing

For example, the PM said there was a need for "capacity building" so that responsibility can be passed along to the Solomon Islanders

But he was apparently not aware that much capacity building was already in place, such as by the many Australian Finance Ministry staff who have rotated through Honiara

Crawshaw said that GNZ needs to do a better job to help publicize RAMSI's work, both in the Solomons and among NGOs in New Zealand

6

(C) Peters also stopped in Papua New Guinea on his way back from the Solomons, where he had a good meeting with PNG Foreign Minister Namaliu Crawshaw said Peters was pleased that PNG is apparently sending the right message to the Solomons Government, and one that tracks closely to Australia's and New Zealand's: -- RAMSI is a package and can't be cut up

-- GOS has the responsibility to ensure the right things happen

-- Good governance is fundamental

-- The economic situation in the Solomons is dire and must be addressed

7

(C) DATT and Pol-Econ Couns also discussed GNZ's Solomons contributions with NZDF officers Brigadier Warren Whiting, Assistant Chief for Strategic Commitments and Intelligence, and Colonel Mike Thompson, Director for Strategic Commitments

Both confirmed that New Zealand will as early as next week draw down their police presence in the Solomons to pre-election levels, from about 64 to

35

The military drawdown will be slower, however

The 125 NZDF personnel now there will be reduced to about 40 by mid-late June

Before the elections, Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga rotated through 1 platoon each

Now, both Australia and New Zealand have standing platoons there, and the others are rotating through

Whiting said the command arrangements still need to be worked through

He anticipates that the expanded force will be in the Solomons at least until the end of the year, if not longer