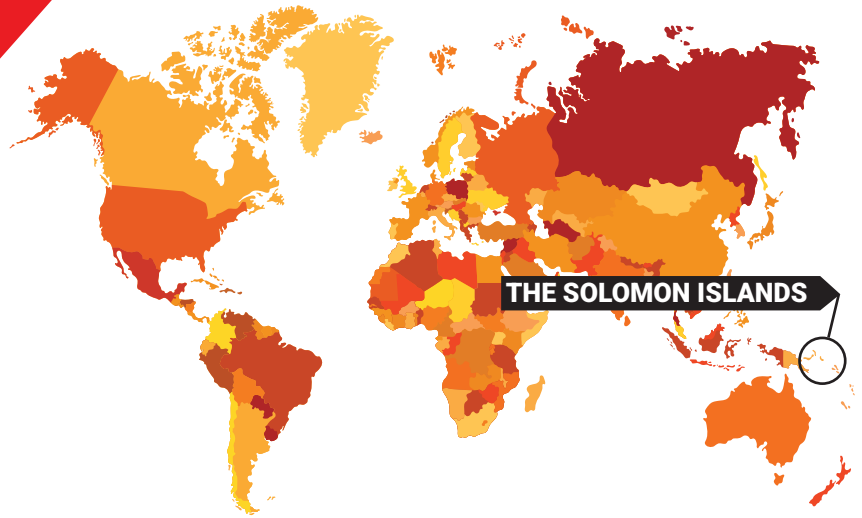


# NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE: PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

## THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

### WHERE:

The Solomon Islands, located in the South Pacific, are part of Melanesia and just to the east of Papua New Guinea. Formerly a British territory, then a protectorate and achieving independence in 1978, the region had seen intense fighting during WWII between the forces of the Allies and the Japanese Army and Navy. The islands have also received refugees from the Bougainville conflict of 1988.



### WHAT:

Following independence in 1978, a number of challenges were faced by the new government of the Solomon Islands. Refugees from Bougainville following the outbreak of violence in 1988, intense and unsustainable logging, ethnic concerns between differing island populations, and accusations of corrupt public spending had created a situation of distrust in the government. This was not helped by internal migration, particularly in the form of residents of Malaita (one of the islands in the nation) moving to Guadalcanal and Honiara (seen as more prosperous) which caused rising distrust amongst the the ethnic population of Guadalcanal.

Some people of Guadalcanal went on to form the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM), also known as the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army and the Isatabu Freedom Fighters. This group started a campaign of intimidation and violence against the Malaitans, some of whom fled the island, and some who remained formed the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF) in 1999 in order to protect themselves, thus adding to the violence.

### WHEN:

Violence erupted fully in 1998 and continued through to 2003 before beginning to subside whilst the International Peace Monitoring Team (IMPT) was in operation. When the IMPT withdrew in 2002, violence quickly resurged, necessitating armed peacekeepers to arrive in 2003. Violence was officially ended with the formation of a Peace and Reconciliation Commission set up by Bishop Desmond Tutu in 2009. Ethnic tensions remain as late as 2025.

### WHY:

Assistance had been requested in 2000 by the Solomon Island government and had resulted in the Townsville Agreement, a peace treaty between the majority of the IFM and the MEF as well as the Solomon Island Government. However, individual militia commanders, including Harold Keke refused to sign and continued to fight. By 2003, armed militia groups on both sides had resorted to banditry, extortion, gang warfare, and even storming government buildings.

Australia, New Zealand, and several Pacific Island nations pledged full assistance including police and military forces under the auspices of Operation Helpem Fren. Armed personnel however were only part of the efforts made to assist the Solomons. Government departments from Australia and New Zealand assisted the Solomon Island government with getting back on its feet and setting up permanent civil service infrastructure.

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## NZDF PEACEKEEPING IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS INTERNATIONAL PEACE MONITORING TEAM AND REGIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION TO THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

### WHEN:

2003-2013.

### WHAT:

New Zealand sent two waves of peacekeepers to the Solomon Islands, alongside Australian and Tongan police and military forces. These came with different operational procedures and goals.

- IMPT: The International Peace Monitoring Team was a small force of unarmed NZDF personnel, in particular logistics specialists, engineers, and soldiers with medical backgrounds. Their mission was to facilitate the disarming of various groups, repairing infrastructure, and improving medical care. This, however, failed to address any of the concerns of the armed groups and few firearms were surrendered.
- RAMSI: The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands was an armed mission with the primary aim of peacekeeping and disarming the warring factions. With a much greater emphasis on security and intelligence gathering, RAMSI was ultimately successful in getting leaders like Harold Keke to come to the negotiating table to find a resolution to the crisis.

### WHEN:

The IMPT operated from 2000 to 2002, with RAMSI being deployed in 2003 and remaining until 2013. Armed police remained until 2017 and civilian/government assistance is still ongoing as of 2025.

### WHY:

Despite alliances with the Solomon Islands, New Zealand and Australia were reluctant to get involved in peacekeeping in the Solomon Islands, largely because their resources were already being stretched by other military commitments, including regional peacekeeping and assisting with the international war on terror.

However, when rioters stormed government buildings in 2000, it became obvious that the situation was not going to resolve peacefully and had the potential to become a destabilising element in the region. As a result, IMPT was dispatched as an attempt to see if peace could be easily achieved.

When it became apparent that IMPT had not succeeded in addressing the causes for the conflict, and with violence reappearing in the Solomon Islands in 2003, it was decided an armed force would be required, especially as local islanders had begun production of firearms. Australia, New Zealand, and Tonga now had troops that could be spared allowing for these forces to operate effectively.