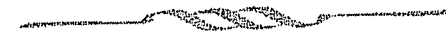


Diplomacy in Theory and Practice



Essays in honor of Christer Jönsson

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(EDS)

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The strengths and limits of academic diplomacy: the case of Bougainville

Peter Wallensteen

The phone call in mid-January 1990 from the Bougainville branch of the University of Papua New Guinea is short and crisp:

- *Is this Professor Wallensteen? It is Graeme Kemelfield calling.*
- *Yes, that is me.*
- *We have read your article!*
- *Yes ...*
- *We find it relevant!*
- *Oh!*
- *Can you come?*

This unexpected call became the starting point of an intense involvement in a conflict in the South Pacific. It also sparked an interest in the use of peace research for practical diplomacy, with the advantage of a base in the academic community. It was an exercise in academic diplomacy for peace and security. The story that unfolded also illustrated a series of key concerns in mediation theory: the entry of the third party (who is inviting whom at what moment in time for what particular function), the process of third-party actions (what to do, when, how, and with what results) and the exit of the third party (when to end, how, and what happens then).

All these questions are challenging, and systematic information

to answer them is only slowly being gathered. In 1990, the literature was highly limited (e.g. Touval & Zartman 1985, Azar & Burton 1986). There are now an increasing number of case studies, particularly on the Palestine conflict (e.g. Corbin 1994, Kelman 1997, Bercovitch 1997, Zartman 1997, Makovsky 1996, Aggestam 1999), Sri Lanka (e.g. Höglund & Svensson 2002) and reports from participants in various peace processes (Bildt 1998, Savir 1998, Holbrooke 1999, Mitchell 1999, Egeland 2008). There are several volumes with comparative case studies (e.g. Zartman & Rasmussen 2007, Stern & Druckman 2000) and some systematic collections of data with analysis (Bercovitch 1996, Greig 2001, Harbom et al. 2006, Nilsson 2006, 2008, Svensson 2006, 2007).

Still, an eyewitness/participant account of a phase of academic diplomacy in Bougainville may have its particular value. The peace-making in this conflict has attracted increasing attention, particularly following the peace agreement in 2001 (Rolfe 2001, Regan 2002, Boege 2006, among many others). The events of 1990, however, have not gained the same attention (Carl & Garasu 2002, Wallensteen 2005 has a little on this). Now, for the first time described, I am providing a detailed account as such an invited third party, close to twenty years later when some of the tensions may have subsided. It will raise some questions for mediation theory and ask whether such academic diplomacy has a role to play: What are its strengths and weaknesses?

Entering the conflict

Through the work of the conflict data project in the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, I was aware of the land conflict in Bougainville. From a distance it seemed peculiar: It was the landowners who were rebelling. Our thinking was normally geared towards tenants and small farmers reacting against landowners. In Bougainville it was landowners who took up arms against a major

international corporation, Bougainville Copper Limited, a subsidiary of an Australian company, and against the government defending its mining operation. Bougainville was not only a beautiful island in the western waters of the South Pacific. It was also built on a geological formation rich in high-quality copper ore. Its beauty, I soon witnessed, was tarnished by tailings from the open pit mining that had gone on for 15 years. It was one of the most lucrative mining operations in the world. Indeed, the mine was said to have earned back its initial investment in the very first year of production. However, there was a price: Rivers and waters outside the river mouth were polluted, the fish had disappeared and the mine was literally eating up the ground that had provided the income for the landowners.

The landowners had been paid by the early representatives of the company, but it was mostly men who had signed the deals, taken the money and wasted it in the nearest bar. They did not mind, as they knew it was their wives, not they, who were the true owners. Bougainville has a strong matriarchal tradition, and land was inherited from mother to daughter, while the boys, as one mother told me, were married away in the next village. Thus, according to custom, the agreement had no value. However, PNG was applying western laws and the PNG government – in distant Port Moresby on the main island – received its share of the copper income. Many in Bougainville felt cheated. The association of landowners had made specific but expensive demands, which went unheeded. This led some members to encourage the taking up of arms. An armed movement developed its own explosives by using some of the remnants from the major battle that went on between the Americans and the Japanese in Bougainville, almost 50 years earlier, during the Second World War.

By January 1990, the conflict had escalated. There had been an attempt at indirect negotiations, but to no avail. The PNG government under Prime Minister Rabbie Namaliu was a coalition of several

parties with different agendas. The balance had shifted towards a military solution and the government initiated a new offensive to crush the rebels once and for all. The rebels, now organized as the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), were led by the mysterious and reclusive Francis Ona, who seldom participated in public functions, and his commander, Samuel Kauona, who was trained in Australia and had the bomb-making skills that the BRA needed.

Thus, by January 1990, the conditions on the island had deteriorated considerably. The copper mine had ceased to function in May 1989. Many of the workers and others, attracted by the strong economy of the island, began to leave. To some extent they were pushed out by the Bougainvilleans, so a form of “ethnic cleansing” was clearly taking place, although the term had not yet gained currency. The government’s campaign, however, misfired: The locals, whether supportive or not of the BRA, felt harassed and abused by the PNG forces, who largely came from other parts of the ethnically diverse state. The BRA gained new recruits, but was also pushed into the forests of the island. The BRA began to argue for secession, developing plans to make the island an independent republic. This, in turn, made the national government even more determined to end the rebellion, fearing other parts of the state could follow suit.

In this situation, the local administration of the province, the North Solomons, found itself squeezed between the national government and the rebels. To find a way out, it formed a “think-tank” led by a University teacher, Graeme Kemelfield, originally from Australia, but married to a Bougainvillean. The think-tank had come across an article I had written on the conditions of conflict resolution from a former participant in a SIDA-sponsored program at Uppsala University. They contacted International Alert, an NGO in London led by Martin Ennals, formerly Secretary-General of Amnesty International, who in turn gave them my telephone number.

Of course, it was a challenge to become a third-party actor in a difficult conflict. The think-tank had no money, but Carl Tham, the Director-General of SIDA, the Swedish International Development Agency, was willing to give me SEK 50 000 (about US\$ 7,000) to go. I canceled my lectures in Uppsala and flew to the capital of PNG, where I arrived on February 10. It resulted in three weeks of very intensive diplomacy. The fact that an academic professor in peace from the other side of the planet unexpectedly received a key role drew attention, not the least as some results were achieved. It gave me some insights into the strengths and limits of academic diplomacy.

The parties

The way I entered the conflict, as a complete outsider, with no experience in the area, from a neutral country that also had no record or particular interest in the region, and from a university that was respected and seen as a civil, non-governmental institution, were three significant assets. Being a professor seemed to signal impartiality but also creativity and knowledge. A lack of national or business interest added to my credibility. A first question skeptics asked me was: Who is paying you? To be able to answer truthfully – that it was SIDA – improved my standing, not the least since development aid carried high regard at this time, even the promise of some future support. Thus, there was no suspicion among the parties in PNG against either me or my role.

The same day I landed in Port Moresby I was taken to the Prime Minister's Office in one of the tallest buildings in the city. In fact, from the office, one could only see one taller building in the neighborhood. "That is the Australian High Commission," I was told, with an undertone of bitterness. Prime Minister Namaliu outlined his and the cabinet's views of the Bougainville conflict. In condensed form this is what he told me:

We want to end this conflict peacefully. We do not like seeing our own citizens killed. We do not like the bad publicity our country is receiving in the international media. We are a peaceful and diverse country. We want to open the copper mine again. The incomes are needed for Bougainville and for the country. Please, explain this to the rebels when you meet them. Everything can be discussed. But we cannot accept secession. That has to be clear. I inherited Papua New Guinea as a country of many peoples united as one state. That is the way I am going to hand over this state to my successor one day. I am not going to see a dismantling of the state.

In short, Prime Minister Namaliu outlined the principle of territorial integrity. It was not possible for him and his government to operate differently, he made clear. PNG, I was informed, consists of peoples with more than 700 different languages. If one area were to secede, others might want to do the same, particularly those with resources, leaving all the others in poverty. He could illustrate the point with recent riots in some gold-mining areas. To my direct question of whether some form of autonomy was possible, he said that he did not rule that out. In fact, the constitution allowed for self-rule for different provinces. Bougainville, being the main part of the North Solomons province, already had considerable autonomy. "It even has its own Premier," he said. Certainly this was true, the decentralization that had been offered had been particularly well received in Bougainville. This, in turn, was the result of a short-lived declaration of independence that island representatives had made in 1975, when PNG became independent. A delegation had actually gone to the UN to demand recognition. A leader of that movement was now a representative of the province and had a seat in the government.

The issues were clearly stated by the government: an end to the violence, a discussion on the opening of the mine, but also a discussion on the status of the island within PNG was conceivable.

With this in the back of my mind, I flew to Bougainville, which was under a state of emergency. Nobody was allowed to visit without special permission of the government. This was all arranged. The think-tank indeed had prepared for this mission properly. It became very significant for what was to follow. The idea was originally that there were to be three of us, but the two others withdrew for various reasons. That left me as the lone outsider.

On arrival at the airport, I was met by Graeme Kemelfield. When we set out for the University branch, we were stopped at a PNG forces roadblock. I began to understand the harassment to which ordinary people were exposed. The soldiers were arrogant, nervous and not willing to accept the papers I had from their own government. Grim-looking, armed soldiers climbed into our car and we were driven off to the military headquarters. My luggage was searched and some papers on the Bougainville conflict were confiscated. It was not a promising start to a peace mission!

However, the security officer in charge was better informed. He apologized and listened to Kemelfield's explanation of our mission. Finally, he assured us that the Toyota Land Cruiser with the University of PNG emblem on its doors was allowed to pass through the lines, as far as the government side was concerned. However, some of the papers were not returned.

Thus, we arrived safely at the meeting of the think-tank, which consisted of some four additional persons with vast contacts across the island. Through informal channels they had already arranged a visit with the BRA leader Samuel Kauona.

A day later, on February 15, we set out to visit BRA-held territory. The PNG soldiers around the airport now made no difficulties, the University car could pass. We entered into abandoned territory, passing an empty schoolhouse, and continued on the main road, where there was no other traffic but our vehicle.

Suddenly, we were stopped by a group of men with odd-looking weapons, including some old rifles. Most of them had no shoes,

and they were wearing shorts and T-shirts (I recall one with the inscription "I love New York"). This was the BRA roadblock. The BRA soldiers were indeed a different crowd from the PNG forces. They were distinctly less well equipped, even demonstrating the slingshot as their "best" weapon. They had darker skin (it turned out they subscribed to the notion of "Black is Beautiful" and in fact called the PNG forces, which were drawn from other islands, "Redskins"). They were in a happier mood and welcomed us to their area. They climbed onto the car and gave directions to the drivers. We veered off onto smaller and smaller roads, until the road turned into a path. The car was hidden under the thick coverage of trees and brush. "We are worried about the government's attack helicopters," they explained. From there on, we progressed by foot. My think-tank colleagues did not look worried, but I wondered whether I would ever return to Uppsala.

The walk was not too long and we arrived at a camp, where the meeting was to take place. The military leader of the BRA, Samuel Kauona, appeared, smiling happily, and offered us a drink cocoa milk as a welcome. We then sat down for a conversation. It lasted for about four hours. He outlined his view of the conflict. In summary form, the following was his perspective:

We do not want to fight this war. But we have no choice. The copper mine had destroyed our land, our waters and our fish. The environment was deteriorating. By stopping the production, we have also stopped pollution. The fish are now recovering. We have ruled ourselves for 40,000 years. We have survived on our lands; we can continue to live by ourselves. We do not need the mining; we do not need the PNG government. The government only wants to destroy us.

He turned to me and asked a pointed question: "We hear on the BBC that Lithuania has declared itself independent. We understand

that. Tell me, Professor, why do we have to be with this country [he meant PNG], which we have never asked to be with? Is that democracy?"

The position was very clear. He and the BRA did not want violence, did not want the mine and did not want to be ruled by the PNG government. Except for the desire to stop the violence, there was nothing on which he and the government agreed. The parties were in a situation where they had positions that entirely contradicted each other. The elements of conflict were obvious: There was fear on each side of what the other wanted to do, there were actions that underscored this, and the key issues seemed to be incompatible. Indeed, there was a need for a third party looking at the situation.

A third-party perspective

After his initial explanation of the BRA position, the conversation with Sam Kauona turned into a serious discussion on self-rule and independence. I told him of the Åland Islands, located between Sweden and Finland. It made him interested, not only because these were also islands, albeit distant. What interested him was the demilitarization and the autonomy of the islands. "We do not want armies in our land," he explained, although he had a military background himself in the PNG Defence Forces. Formally, he had actually deserted the national force to join the rebel movement: "We want to rule ourselves, but we are not interested in embassies in other countries or in the UN." I understood this to mean that, to him at least, island self-rule was the most important, not necessarily statehood as an independent republic. Much of what one could have as an independent state would actually be acquired with a sufficiently strong autonomy.

However, he was not interested in opening the mine again. Others around him were less resolute on this issue. Some actually

indicated to me that they could accept mining production from the present mine (but no new mines) if it were under "responsible management." To them, that meant it could not be under an Australian company. Other companies could be possible, one person confessed to me, even hinting at the possibility of a Swedish one.

From my conversations with Kauona, it emerged that he could imagine a discussion on the key issues with the government. He even said "the sooner, the better." In his view, however, a third party had to be present. He would not trust the government. That had to do with the fighting: "There can be no talks as long as the government wants to wipe us out. The government has proclaimed a 'total war' against us. That has to stop!" In other words, a credible cease-fire was a first step.

Much peace research literature discusses the significance of cease-fires. There are too many examples of failed cease-fires. Either they are extremely short-lived (violations can occur easily, conditions can be unclear, and fears can linger) or very long lasting (thus, in effect freezing a situation along the military lines, as seen in the cases of the divided Korea and divided Cyprus). A cease-fire arrangement, in other words, has to be strongly coupled to a peace process, not a measure on its own.

However, Kauona was more concerned with the modalities of a cease-fire. It would have to include the withdrawal of the PNG Defence Forces from the island. He had no problem with the simultaneous disarming of the BRA forces. However, the cease-fire had to be supervised by the UN. The government, he made clear, could not be trusted. The idea of involving the UN, thus, was not to have international recognition of the BRA, but to have someone observing the government. For me, it was not difficult to anticipate the government's objections to a UN presence: The conflict was a domestic matter, and the government was opposed to any internationalization of the issue. This was the common view in 1990, and few countries had yet accepted international involvement in

domestic affairs. However, I explained to Kauona that the UN does not have its own forces, but has to call on countries to supply them. Which countries that would be acceptable then became an issue. In the end, the reply from the BRA side was "no countries in the region and only countries with a good record of human rights, such as Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Canada." For some reason the BRA also wanted to include an African country; in the end, that became Ghana. Indeed, New Guinea was actually given the name by a European explorer who also had been in the Bay of Guinea in West Africa and saw a similarity between the inhabitants. However, in this context, Ghana was a symbol as it was the first black African country to gain independence from colonial rule.

The think-tank was pleased with the discussions and we set out to work on a cease-fire within a broader framework. I flew back to Port Moresby and explained what Kauona had told me. Prime Minister Namaliu was satisfied: Autonomy could be discussed, as well as the mining operations. The cease-fire conditions, however, were more difficult: It would require making an agreement with "rebels" who actually had been breaking PNG law by taking up arms. The Prime Minister was willing to accept this, to improve the chances of peace, but other coalition partners were not. The government would have to have a special cabinet meeting. It was definitely not an easy decision.

A particular stumbling block was, not unexpectedly, the international observers. The government did not want any, and during the discussions I could point to the situation in Nicaragua as an interesting "model." Certainly, the peace process in Nicaragua was not high in the minds of the PNG politicians, but the conflict was still well known. The Sandinista government had agreed to international observer missions of its national elections in early 1990, as part of a process to end the civil war with the US-sponsored rebels, the so-called Contras. The formula was that the government invited the outsiders to observe the elections. Thus, I suggested, if the PNG

government invites some countries to observe the cease-fire, this is the government using its sovereignty to do what it chooses to do. It is not an arrangement imposed from the outside. This formula was accepted, but the fact that there was a precedent was particularly convincing. The PNG foreign ministry was assigned the task of formulating the invitations to the governments that were agreed between the government and the BRA. Thus, two Swedish diplomats ended up in Bougainville in March 1990, in a mission led by a diplomat from Ghana.

From this experience I concluded that academic insights were useful and, in particular, could help to strengthen the role of a third party. By following different conflicts, ideas could be identified and their use in particular settings could be reviewed. Ideas are not tied to contexts. They are transferable, even globally. Ideas from the Åland Islands and Nicaragua were applicable in the South Pacific. Thus, academics not only served as impartial listeners, but could also inject proposals into a process. In this case, a central element was the autonomy idea. As the conflict continued, this element became controversial in its own right. I became identified with the autonomy proposal. As this was closer to some parts of the BRA, the BRA wanted me to continue as a third party. I had been useful also for Prime Minister Namaliu, who may have seen it the same way. To others, however, this became too active a role. They preferred, in later rounds of negotiations, to have third parties who were only observing, not suggesting. That, in my view, meant that the parties could not benefit from the value added by a third party.

Secondary parties

Australia was the closest major country to Papua New Guinea. It had held control over the entire territory since the First World War, when it took over the parts that had belonged to Germany (which included Bougainville, by the way). It was, however, not a regular

part of Australia, but a mandate under the League of Nations (later a trust territory under the UN). That is why it was natural that a group went from Bougainville to the UN at the time of the independence of PNG in 1975. It was the UN that "supervised" the trusteeship. Thus, it was to the UN that one could turn in times of crisis. However, the UN did not pay attention to the Bougainville situation until the mid-1990s. Australia may have had something to do with that. In 1990 it was still a farfetched idea.

Australia was the central secondary party to the conflict. It was the main provider of assistance to the PNG government. It was an Australian company and Australian personnel that ran the copper mining in Bougainville. It was Australia that had provided helicopters for the PNG Defence Forces (ostensibly not for aggressive purposes, but it was not difficult to use them to track down people on the ground). Thus, the BRA saw Australia as a hostile actor. Also, the PNG government wanted to demonstrate its distance from the Australians. However, the reality was that Australia could not be ignored. It had to be on board. Thus, I went to Canberra to inform the Swedish embassy and it, in turn, told the Australians.

The ones most concerned about my mission and my doings in PNG, even baffled, were no doubt the Australian Foreign Service. One of them later said, in the blunt style that is typical: "We were really laughing when we heard the idea of a peace professor from Sweden coming to Bougainville. Now we have stopped laughing." I take that as a kind of praise. There was, however, no intention of having Australia directly involved in my and the think-tank's approach to the mediation. The idea that emerged was a different one that turned out to be fruitful: the Commonwealth.

The British Commonwealth had transformed itself into an international organization, the Commonwealth of Nations. PNG was a member, as well as some 50 other countries, many of which were smaller than PNG in terms of population. A Commonwealth member state, Grenada, had been invaded by US forces in 1983.

This had upset the leading member of the organization, the United Kingdom, and by 1985 a report on security assistance to small states had been worked out. It was accepted by the Commonwealth meeting in Nassau the same year. This meant that PNG could ask for assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat for the crisis in Bougainville. This is what now happened, apparently one of the first times this mechanism was put into practice. The idea was that the Commonwealth would participate in the observation of the cease-fire. This, it was hoped, would make the Australians more comfortable with the development.

Thus, the contours of an ad-hoc peace mission were gradually taking shape: It was to consist of a set of countries, as agreed by the primary parties, and the Commonwealth. It would be recruited primarily from the diplomatic corps in Canberra, as most relevant countries did not have a representative stationed in PNG itself. The mission was to go to the island to watch the withdrawal of the PNG forces and the disarming of the BRA.

Thus, the way the talks evolved in the Bougainville conflict made international participation inevitable. The BRA – as most other rebel groups around the world – could not trust the government. Indeed, that was the basic reason why they had taken up arms. The government, on its side, would not trust the rebels, as they were breaking the laws of the country. Thus, it seems quite obvious that an international participation in any agreement is the logical answer to the dilemma. The ad hoc arrangement for Bougainville nevertheless was one of the first of its kind. Both sides were nervous about the outcome, and international presence helped to reassure them of what the opponent would be able to do. Thus, having secondary parties supporting the peace efforts was crucial for ending the violence in March 1990.

The agreement

On my return to Port Moresby, I noticed that the communications between the government and the BRA were about to break down. The think-tank members were traveling across the road-blocks with a tape recorder. Sam Kauona recorded his message; the responsible officer of the PNG forces on the island, Col. Leo Nuia, responded. The idea was that the two would meet and sort out the many details of making a cease-fire. That turned out to be impossible. Neither side would be secure or could guarantee that their side could be controlled from attacking the other. My suggestion that one might use mobile phones [I even indicated the name of a leading Swedish producer that might be happy to supply the equipment] was turned down: "I can be tracked," Kauona claimed. Thus, the tape recordings were an appropriate solution. However, the two military leaders gradually started to shout at each other. The situation seemed critical. If there was no agreement on the cease-fire, there would be no continuation of the process. It now seemed crucial to find a way to connect directly. The Prime Minister wanted me to talk to Kauona. I suggested that a leading envoy from him would also join. He agreed. The idea was transmitted to Kauona, who responded quickly and positively. On February 24, the think-tank members, the Prime Minister's special envoy and I met with Kauona on the island.

It was pouring rain and we were crammed into a small traditional house. The atmosphere was very tense. The BRA leaders were suspicious having the "enemy" among them; the envoy was worried but brave. He said he had a message from the Prime Minister and pulled out the tape. It was plugged into the recorder, but the machine refused to start. The batteries were dead. It was blamed on the rain. Frantic actions ensued. Soldiers and assistants were sent out in all directions to find batteries. The tension in the small house was almost palpable. This was a failure for the BRA not to have a functioning recorder. After some time, batteries started to

come in. In the end we had a bag full of batteries. The tape recorder began to function and was switched on: Only classical music! The BRA leaders stared at the special envoy: Was this a joke? He tried to calm them: The message is hidden in the tape. Clearly, the government was worried about the tape falling into the wrong hands and wanted to conceal the message. The "fast forward" button brought us further into the tape. Suddenly, there was the message from the Prime Minister! The rain continued; all other movements ceased completely. The Prime Minister explained the role of the special envoy and of me. He went on to say that he had not proclaimed a "total war" on the rebels. They were all citizens of the same country. There had been a tradition of living in peace among the inhabitants on Bougainville and on PNG. He wanted to restore that. He was willing to discuss any grievances the listeners might have, and he wanted to conclude a cease-fire as a first step. To this end, his special envoy was authorized to cooperate with Professor Wallenstein and the think-tank to conclude an agreement.

The Prime Minister also mentioned the need for a special peace ceremony to seal the deal. His voice disappeared and the music began again. There was a moment of complete silence. How were the guerrillas going to respond? In an instant, everything changed. They began to cheer and applaud. There were big smiles on all faces. Kauona ordered food to celebrate! The envoy looked relieved. Certainly I was. I had watched the men in the house as they listened attentively. They showed no reactions while the Prime Minister spoke. Now, the meeting turned into a major feast. Traditional foods were combined with more Western dishes. Drinks, yes, but no alcohol. The discussions continued. Darkness fell. But an agreement was worked out on when to start the cease-fire and how it was to be understood. The basics of a text were there, to be refined over the following days with the help of the think-tank and its computer. The cease-fire was to start at 6 am on Friday, March 2, 1990. The PNG forces were to be withdrawn by March

16. BRA weapons were to be assembled in three places. Neutral international observers were to supervise the process. Following the implementation of the cease-fire, negotiations were to start on the issues of the status of Bougainville and on the mining operations. The agreement was to be signed by the two military commanders, Col. Nuia for the PNG and Samuel Kauona for the BRA.

We left the meeting in a good mood. We drew back towards the government lines. It was late. Actually, it was well passed the start of the curfew. Thus, the fact that a car approached from the rebel side towards the government outpost drew considerable attention from the PNG soldiers. Our car was surrounded by a rowdy crowd of soldiers who spent the evening drinking and shooting their guns into the darkness. The Prime Minister's envoy introduced himself and explained to the commanding officer who he was. The officer just stared back and laughed: "Yes, sure, and I am Col. Nuia!" The others around laughed and one soldier began to pull one of the think-tank members from the car. We held him back. The soldiers grabbed his glasses and took them. This was about to get out of hand. It was quite a contrast to the happy meeting with the BRA that finished less than an hour before! Could the government really control its own forces? After further discussions, a more senior officer appeared, noted our names and let us through. The special envoy was steaming, and I would later hear him report to the Prime Minister. He was shouting so that nobody around could miss a word.

There were probably more phone calls that evening, as we received an apology the next morning and even the glasses were brought back. But it was not a good sign. For me, however, it had been an unforgettable experience. It was also my 22nd wedding anniversary!

The agreement was turned into an official document. The first version covered two pages, but that was too long. One of the parties insisted that it should be only one page: "If one page is covered by

another, there might also be other hidden pages." The computer provided the technological ability to adjust the margins and font size, but some lengthy sections still had to be deleted. The government wanted the emblem of PNG to be on the document. I worried what the BRA would say, but the response was: "That is fine, it means the government has to implement it if it is on PNG letterhead." The agreement was completed, the commanders signed and Kauona spent some time walking around to his troops to explain what was now expected of them.

The impact of the cease-fire was immediate. Even before it was in place, the soldiers at the roadblocks began to relax. One told me that he now wished to go home as soon as possible: "We have no business here, they are very different from us, why should we be here?" The market opened up. Youngsters began to play football on the beautiful beaches that previously had stood empty. War and the fear of war have tremendous psychological impacts on all concerned. It is not a natural state of affairs for human life.

Exit of a third party

A day after the cease-fire I went back to Sweden. The government and the BRA expected me to return when negotiations on the real issues were to start. However, on the eve of my departure, an envoy from New Zealand came up to me in the bar of the hotel in Port Moresby. He said that the PNG security services were looking for me and that there were grumblings among the military about the cease-fire. It was probably wise for me to leave the scene, he indicated. He certainly was well informed. Also, he was to play a crucial role some seven years later. I was not too worried, however, as I had the support of the Prime Minister.

But soon some unexpected events took place. The PNG forces suddenly withdrew from Bougainville, before the international observers had arrived. Some remaining issues, notably on the sta-

tioning of PNG police on the island, had not yet been worked out. Deliberately, the head of the PNG military forces created a new situation. By mid-March the troops were assembled outside Port Moresby. There was considerable irritation among them about the withdrawal. After some drinking, an unorganized military group set out towards the residence of the Prime Minister. They wanted to "talk" to him or, possibly, arrest him. Was it a military coup? It is hard to know. The responsible officer resigned the following day but, as is often the case in PNG politics, returned to power a year later, openly proclaiming his opposition to the 1990 cease-fire agreement.

The international inspectors noted that the Bougainville cease-fire had been implemented by the parties, although its report also remarked on the premature departure of the PNG forces. A strange situation now prevailed on the island. Instead of tension as a result of armed action, a lack of any authority at all rapidly developed. This was not what the peacemaking had been all about. Furthermore, the government was unclear about how it should proceed. The problems with its own military were one part of it. Presumably, there were also issues within the coalition and with parliamentarians. I was constantly adjusting my reservation for a return flight, but I kept being asked to wait for the right moment. It never came.

The BRA also felt that the situation was unclear. Why was the government stalling the start of the talks? Was it planning some drastic move? Increasingly concerned, but also realizing that the withdrawal of the PNG forces had provided it with an unprecedented opportunity, the BRA made a move. On May 17, 1990, it proclaimed the independence of Bougainville, formed a coalition "government" of its own and broke into the sealed storages to retrieve its weapons. The conflict took an entirely new turn. The government responded by cutting off all transportation, trade and interactions with the island, in fact, imposing its own sanctions and

isolating Bougainville. No country ever recognized the new state. Smugglers appeared, coming to the islands for instance, from the nearby Solomon Islands. The isolation created hardships on the islands. Particularly devastating was the lack of medical supplies. Gradually, the conflict returned to armed action, with the government landing troops and supporting splinter groups. There were repeated attempts to restart negotiations, but the only really significant efforts were those that New Zealand organized in 1997 and which led to the peace agreement in 2001. A basic trait of the agreement was a referendum on regional autonomy, within a 10–15 year time span.

Lessons for mediation

In retrospect, one might say that the opportunity for negotiations was "ripe" in January and February 1990. The government had tried a military solution without success; the rebels had lost and were pushed back, but they were not defeated. It dawned on the opponents that the armed confrontation could go on for a long time. So there was an interest in negotiations. However, there were many similar situations in the following years that did *not* lead to negotiations. Furthermore, the think-tank that took the initiative started its work because the situation was deteriorating and it wanted to do something about it. The think-tank only saw how the society around it was beginning to fall apart. It established the necessary relations, but without regard to the "ripeness" of the situation. The Prime Minister's perspective was probably similar. Thus, the offer of a third-party action provided an opportunity to pursue a different course of action, for a time.

For the members of the think-tank it was close to an existential issue to stop the war, for the government it was one of its options. The failure of this first peace effort also had a price. Many of the members of the think-tank had to leave the island. Graeme Kemel-

field brought his family to Australia, where he died some years later. He had tried to avert the danger, but the conflict unleashed a dynamic he could not withstand. It was symbolic that the only car that could pass the battle lines was torched and burned. The Prime Minister also had to leave office, but short tenures were the rule in PNG politics.

Thus, from this experience it is hard to say that a particular "hurting stalemate" either produces peace initiatives or is a necessary precondition for them (see Zartman, 1989, 2001). It is more typical that peace initiatives are always needed, and that it is difficult to determine if the time is "ripe." It is to the credit of the think-tank that it was persistent and took the initiative. Indeed, the opportunity may not have arisen, had SIDA not been willing to support the endeavor.

Furthermore, in conflicts many issues are obscure and many actions difficult to understand, and even more to control. As a third party I had some insight into the interactions between the two sides, but it was hard to know what was going on within each. For the different sides, their internal dynamics were probably highly significant. The Prime Minister had to keep his cabinet intact and survive challenges in the Parliament. He also had to deal with a host of other pressing government matters. The relations between Sam Kauona and Francis Ona were elusive, not to say mysterious. The Prime Minister had a diverse coalition to manage, but the BRA also had many and undefined tensions. Some wanted independence, others not; some wanted the mine to start, others not; some may have been in the war for family honor; others for loot and personal gain. Leaders on both sides feared being undermined by opposition from within. These are dynamics into which the outside third party enters: peace proposals, actions, and statements are evaluated by different factions. But the third party is not likely to have access to these deliberations. Both sides prefer to present a unified position to the outsider and to the opponent. The reality may never be

entirely clear to any of those involved. What matters are the decisions that can be derived from the messiness of the situation. On March 1, 1990, there was agreement on some measures with clear real world implications. In 1997, another truce was concluded. It still took another four years to advance from that shared decision to a peace agreement.

In the February 1990 discussions, the idea was to couple the cease-fire with a sustained peace process. There was agreement on this. But that could not be written into the cease-fire document. It dealt strictly with the conditions for ending hostilities. This fact may have indicated that there was opposition to a continuation of peacemaking within either or both sides. It was defended, however, with the argument that this was not a "political" document, only a military one, and thus to be signed by the military commanders, not the political leaders. It was presented as a technical document, which, of course, it was not. It meant that the two sides at least identified whom they were fighting and that they thought it would be possible to discuss issues with the other.

It was a most public process. To me, it is obvious that the agreement carried the support of the population at large on Bougainville. There was joy over the end of fighting. However, there were no spokespersons who pushed for the continuation of the process. The think-tank and the North Solomons provincial government did, but there was a lack of popular manifestations. In Port Moresby, there was even less public support. The conflict seemed only to concern those displaced by the conflict and they were, understandably, hostile towards the BRA. The government was more troubled by the fiscal implications of the conflict: Sustaining a military force in Bougainville was costly, and at the same time the copper incomes were lacking. The government had in fact appointed a "razor gang" to make deep cuts in government spending. If the fighting ceased, that would save money, and as a new mine was about to open elsewhere in PNG, money would start coming in. Thus, a thorough

peace agreement had few supporters in the capital. The peace process was left to a small group of concerned leaders and citizens. It is interesting to observe that by the end of the 1990s the situation had changed, not the least through the emergence of women's groups that pressed strongly for an end to the conflict. Peace processes without manifest popular support are likely to be more fragile and more exposed to the wishes, hopes and even whims of particular decision-makers who may act without accountability.

This means that individual third parties are not involved in a conflict for a long period of time. They are probably more useful under particular conditions, when there are possibilities of agreement. The very moment the opposing sides agree to receive a third party may be the most optimal one. There is curiosity about what will happen now; the third party may bring in some fresh perspectives and thus bring about some changes in the dynamics. If it is successful, an agreement can be reached. As time passes, however, conditions also change (new issues, new power constellations, new events on the battlefield, new policies among secondary parties, new economic developments). It is likely that a third party or third parties are most effective if he/she/they can ride on an initial momentum and thus bring about a movement in the conflict in a peaceful direction. After a while, that momentum is likely to be lost, and new injections may be needed.

Certainly, this is true when the third party is derived from small countries, from NGOs, or from universities. The picture may be different if the mediator also has a vested interest in the situation and can bring power to bear. The line between a mediating third party and a self-motivated powerbroker may then be blurred or even eradicated. Typically, the US took over a "mediating" role from Norway when the first agreement was signed between Israel and the PLO on the White House lawn in September 1993. The issue of peace became vital foreign policy for the Clinton administration. But that turned into another type of peacemaking than the

one that took place on the island of Bougainville in 1990. There are limits to academic diplomacy, but it also has its strengths. Some of those were demonstrated during some hectic weeks in February 1990.

A general note

This account is largely based on my own notes, memos and recollections. Considerable information on the background of the conflict was available at the time from many researchers at the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby. They were helpful in briefing me, and sharing published and unpublished papers. The entire endeavor benefited from the tireless efforts of the members of the think-tank. They have not been consulted for this account. I remain entirely responsible for this text.