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Briefing Note



PAPUA NEW GUINEA'S "POLITICAL COUP" The Ousting of Sir Michael Somare

On 2 August 2011 it was announced that Papua New Guinea (PNG) had a new prime minister. The election of former finance minister Peter O'Neill came after the speaker of the National Parliament of Papua New Guinea accepted opposition claims that the prime ministership was vacant, in view of the continuing absence of Sir Michael Somare. Somare had gone to Singapore in April for medical treatment but in August was still there recovering from heart surgery. O'Neill's election came as a surprise to many, and the events surrounding the move, like much in PNG politics, were far from straightforward. However, it now seems unlikely that Somare will return to the country's political leadership and so it might now be time to reflect briefly on his legacy and the possible implications of the change in leadership.

THE LEAD-UP TO 2 AUGUST

In the national election of 2002, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare was re-elected to the East Sepik Provincial seat he had held since 1968, and the party he headed, the National Alliance (NA), won the largest number of seats (19 out of a total of 103 seats declared¹). Under the provisions of the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC), which had been engineered by the outgoing Morauta government primarily to promote the development of an effective party system, Somare, as leader of the largest party group in the parliament, was invited to form government. He successfully put together a coalition of thirteen parties and was elected prime minister by 88 votes to nil (with 14 abstentions).

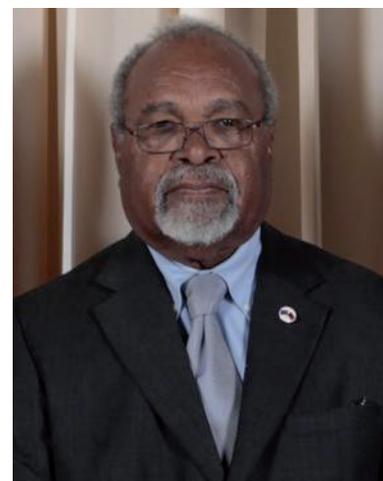
During the 2002–2007 parliament, the hoped-for stability of political allegiances did not materialise, with

attempted votes of no confidence against the government and splits in most major parties, but the Somare government nonetheless became the first since independence in 1975 to survive a full term in office. Somare's substantial majority and the existence, under the OLIPPAC, of sanctions against

"party-hopping" contributed to this, but also relevant were the government's control of parliamentary procedures through a less-than-impartial speaker (NA MP Jeffrey Nape), dominance of parliamentary committees, and adjournment of sittings.

Despite growing complaints of "executive dominance", Somare's success was repeated in the 2007 national election. The NA again won the largest number of seats (27 out of 109 in 2007) and Somare was returned as prime minister by 86 votes to 21. The NA, its numbers boosted by several MPs who joined the party after being elected as independents, headed a coalition of fourteen parties.

As in 2002–2007, the new Somare government used its majority, and a compliant speaker, to dominate parliamentary procedures. In July 2009, when the government adjourned parliament to avoid a vote of no confidence—a move which a *Post-Courier* editorial described as "a shameless exercise in self-preservation"—



Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, 2009.
Photo: Lawrence Jackson

eleven members of the governing coalition defected to the opposition.² One of those who crossed later said, “Decisions were dictated and bulldozed down our throats. Arthur Somare used the position of his father to dictate to us. There was too much concentration of power in one family” (Jamie Maxtone-Graham, PNG Country Party, Anglimp-South Wahgi, quoted in *National* 29 August 2011. See also *Post-Courier* 30 July 2009). Senior members of the coalition government also exploited the legal system in an attempt to resist referrals to leadership tribunals over violations of the Leadership Code.

Then, in July 2010, the Supreme Court handed down a decision with regard to a challenge to the OLIPPAC, which had been initiated by opposition MP Bob Danaya (leader of the PNG Labour Party and MP for Western Province Provincial).³ In an important judgement the Court ruled that several sections of the OLIPPAC were unconstitutional—in particular the provisions restricting MPs from changing their allegiances in parliament. This decision opened the way for a return to the party-hopping and “yo-yo politics” that had characterised parliamentary behaviour before 2001.

Shortly after the Supreme Court decision, deputy prime minister Sir Puka Temu (NA, Abau) and nineteen other members of the governing coalition crossed the floor. A motion of no confidence against Somare was drafted, naming Temu as alternative prime minister, but the following day a motion was passed to adjourn parliament until November. The motion was passed on voices, Speaker Nape refusing a formal vote. The opposition sought to have parliament recalled, and petitioned the Supreme Court to remove the speaker for acting contrary to the constitution, but the house remained adjourned and Nape retained his position. Subsequently, some of those who had left the government drifted back.

In a cabinet reshuffle in July 2010, the NA deputy leader for the Highlands Region, Don Polye (Kandep), was made deputy prime minister (a move which was generally seen as a reward for Polye’s loyalty to Somare in the vote of no confidence) and the leader of the People’s National Congress, Peter O’Neill (Ialibu-Pangia) was promoted to the finance and treasury portfolio to replace Patrick Pruaitch (NA, Aitape-Lumi), who had been suspended in May when referred to a leadership tribunal over alleged misconduct.

When parliament reconvened in November 2010, the opposition revived the motion of no confidence, hoping to precipitate a further split in the governing coalition. There were suggestions that the opposition might nominate a Highlands MP as alternative prime minister in order to

attract support from the large Highlands bloc. However, the parliament met to pass the 2011 budget and 2010 supplementary budget, and promptly adjourned, the attorney general declaring that there was no notice of a motion of no confidence before the parliament. (Reportedly, the notice of motion submitted in July had been rejected by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Private Business because four of the signatories had withdrawn their support after (re)joining the government.)

December 2010 saw another cabinet reshuffle: Polye was relieved of the deputy prime ministership and the works, transport and civil aviation portfolio, which were given to his Engan junior colleague and minister for foreign affairs and migration, Sam Abal (NA, Wabag); Polye took over from Abal as foreign affairs minister. Amongst other changes, Sir Arnold Amet (NA, Madang Provincial) was brought into cabinet to replace Ano Pala (NA, Rigo) as attorney general and minister for Justice.

Shortly after this, Somare “voluntarily stepped aside” from office following his referral by the acting public prosecutor to a leadership tribunal over charges that he had failed to submit financial returns required of him under the Leadership Code, or had submitted late or incomplete returns. (Since 2008 Somare had sought, through a series of unsuccessful court challenges, to avoid being subjected to a leadership tribunal; these were still ongoing in December 2010.) Abal thus became acting prime minister. Polye—who had probably done his political career no immediate good when earlier in the year he had publicly voiced his aspiration to become prime minister—expressed his disappointment but confirmed his commitment to the NA and the government. Others, within and outside the NA, questioned the legality of the appointments within the terms of both the national constitution and the constitution of the NA. But while some saw Abal’s promotion as a move by Somare to forestall a leadership challenge (see, for example *National* 9 December 2010), others claimed that Somare had been “conned” by prominent MPs outside the NA and, that by demoting Polye, the prime minister had caused a rift within the party which could destroy it (*Post-Courier* 3 January 2011).

With a vote of no confidence foreshadowed when parliament was recalled to re-elect a governor general in January 2011, there were predictions of a change of government, with Polye as the likely alternative prime minister. In a full-page advertisement in the *Post-Courier* and the *National* (10 January 2011), however, Polye restated his loyalty to Somare and the NA. In the event,

parliament met briefly to elect a new governor general, and the government then used its majority, and a compliant acting speaker, to adjourn the house until May, once again avoiding a no-confidence vote. The adjournment meant that, for the third consecutive year, the national parliament would not meet for the constitutionally mandated 63 days. The following week, with the appointment of a leadership tribunal still pending as a result of ongoing legal challenges, Somare resumed office.

Finally, in March 2011 Somare came before a leadership tribunal. The tribunal, unusually comprising three distinguished foreign judges from the UK, Australia and New Zealand, found the prime minister guilty of thirteen charges (dismissing another nine) and penalised him with suspension from parliament for two weeks, though one judge favoured his dismissal from office. This penalty was in line with similar cases, where MPs who had failed to submit returns had generally been fined and allowed to resume their seats, however the dissenting judge accused Somare of “a disregard bordering on disdain for his constitutional obligations” (*National* 25 March 2011). Somare publicly apologised for his “administrative oversight” but appeared to take his penalty lightly. Abal again stepped in as acting prime minister.

Shortly after his suspension, Somare, accompanied by his Papua New Guinean physician, travelled to Singapore, where he underwent heart surgery. There were complications and he had two further operations. In late June, he was still recuperating under intensive care in Singapore and there was uncertainty about when he might return. In PNG rumours circulated that the Grand Chief might not be able to resume office, and members of the parliamentary opposition called for the prime ministership to be declared vacant.

On 28 June, Somare’s son Arthur (the MP for Angoram Open and minister for public enterprises), announced that the family had decided that Sir Michael be retired—though Sir Michael had not been consulted at this stage. A group calling itself the East Sepik Council of Chiefs criticised the Somare family for announcing Sir Michael’s “retirement”, claiming that such a decision should have been left to the Council of Chiefs.

In the meantime, Abal, as acting prime minister, was coming under increasing pressure as the sharks had begun circling in the murky waters of PNG’s politics. Within the NA, Abal was supported by the highlands MPs, but the executive committees of the party in the highlands provinces favoured Polye, the deputy party leader for the Highlands Region. In mid May, it was reported that the NA

was meeting to elect an acting party leader, with Polye, Abal and Pruaitch the major contenders, but the meeting did not eventuate. Weeks later Abal stripped Polye of the foreign affairs portfolio, accusing him of insubordination, and also sacked the United Resources Party (URP) leader, William Duma (the member for Hagen), as minister for petroleum and energy, citing mismanagement of the critical liquified natural gas (LNG) project. The foreign affairs portfolio was given to former attorney general Ano Pala. Duma was replaced by Francis Potape (URP, Komo-Margarima), and retaliated by expelling Potape and party founder Anderson Agiru (Southern Highlands Provincial), thus splitting the URP into two factions. Pruaitch was brought back into cabinet as minister for Finance and Treasury⁴ and O’Neill relegated to works, transport and civil aviation. It was subsequently reported that the Enga branch of the NA had suspended Abal for “actions not in the best interests of the party”, and that a number of MPs, including Polye, Duma and O’Neill, were joining the opposition (*Post-Courier* 20 June 2011).

In July, pressures mounted to remove Somare from the prime ministership on medical grounds (as provided by the national constitution) and the Papua New Guinea Medical Board was approached to appoint two medical practitioners to report on the prime minister’s medical status. With parliament due to meet again on 2 August, opposition leaders, including Belden Namah (Vanimo-Green River), Sam Basil (PPP, Bulolo), former prime minister Mekere Morauta (PNG Party, Moresby Northwest), and Allan Marat (Melanesian Liberal Party, Rabaul), met in Vanimo. Namah, who had been elected in 2007 as an NA candidate but defected to the PNG Party in July 2010 and taken over the party leadership from party founder Morauta, had replaced Morauta as opposition leader in May 2011.

When the National Parliament met on 2 August, Namah declared that the office of prime minister was vacant; he asked that standing orders be suspended and that he be allowed to move a motion to elect a new prime minister. The speaker, Jeffrey Nape, accepted the motion and Namah nominated O’Neill. Refusing to acknowledge calls for points of order and for divisions, a vote was taken and O’Neill, whose PNC party claimed only six MPs, was elected by a solid 70 votes to 24, with 48 MPs, including about half of the NA, crossing the floor. Later that afternoon the new prime minister was sworn in. Of the major parties in the Somare coalition government, the United Resources Party, Pangu Pati and People’s Action Party, as well as the NA, split on the vote. Polye was said to be “stunned” at

O'Neill's successful takeover (though he had apparently accepted the nomination of O'Neill the previous night), while Abal, who was one of the 24 voting against O'Neill, accused the speaker of "hijacking the process" and "[committing] an illegal act" (quoted in *The Age* 3 August 2011). Abal's view was endorsed by prominent constitutional lawyer John Nonggor, who said, "We, today, have an illegitimate government. The purported election is unconstitutional. Sir Michael remains the PM" (*Post-Courier* 5 August 2011).

A week later, O'Neill announced his cabinet. Namah was named as deputy prime minister and given the portfolio of forestry and climate change. Polye became minister for finance and treasury. Former deputy prime minister Sir Puka Temu, who had split with Somare in 2010, became minister for agriculture and livestock. Duma was brought back as minister for petroleum and energy, and Marat was named as attorney general and justice minister.⁵ Fifteen MPs who had been ministers in the Somare government remained in cabinet. The two elder statesmen of the former opposition, Morauta and Philemon, settled for the relatively minor portfolios of public enterprises and public service respectively, and reportedly said they would not re-contest in 2012 (*National* 10 August 2011). Newcomers Sam Basil (who was deputy leader of the opposition) and Byron Chan were given the strategic portfolios of national planning and mining. Although O'Neill said he had tried his best to cover all provinces in his cabinet, the East Sepik and West New Britain provinces, which had been strongly represented in Somare's cabinet, were without representation in the new executive. The one woman MP, Dame Carol Kidu, who had been minister for community development in the Somare government and continued to support Somare, was dropped from cabinet.

The legality of what some described as a "political coup" was questioned in several quarters and a formal challenge was issued by the East Sepik Provincial Government, which sought a Supreme Court special ruling on the declaration of vacancy of the prime ministership. The new government, through the ministry of finance and treasury, responded by withdrawing financial powers from the provincial government—a move which was almost certainly illegal and was subsequently reversed by O'Neill when he was advised by the solicitor general that there was no legal instrument in place to authorise the removal of powers. Outside of the East Sepik Province, however, there was little public outcry; indeed many welcomed the change.

Towards the end of August, it was reported that Somare had been discharged from hospital but was still recuperating

in Singapore. On 1 September, he announced "I am ready, willing and able to complete my term as the only legally elected prime minister of Papua New Guinea" (*Post-Courier* 1 September 2011). On 4 September, Somare returned to PNG and two days later, in a wheelchair, attended a sitting of parliament called at short notice by the speaker, in what was probably (as suggested by East Sepik Governor Peter Wararu Waranaka) an attempt to have Somare disqualified as an MP for failing to attend three successive meetings of parliament.⁶ Notwithstanding Somare's presence, in a final act of political thuggery, he was ruled to have lost his seat—ironically by the speaker, Nape, who had been the main "enforcer" of the Somare government's executive dominance from 2004 to 2010. A *National* newspaper editorial (13 September 2011) described the move as "a most indecent thing", and former prime minister Rabbie Namaliu said it was "undignified and unnecessary" (*Radio Australia* 21 September 2011).

Somare sought a stay on the ruling, which was opposed by Nape, O'Neill, Marat and the clerk of the National Parliament, Don Pandan; lawyers for the four defendants further claimed that Somare was of "unsound mind" while hospitalised in Singapore, providing additional grounds for disqualification from office. The National Court declined to intervene, noting, on 20 September, that a challenge to the declaration of the vacancy of the prime ministership was already before the Supreme Court. Attempts by Attorney General Marat to have the East Sepik challenge dismissed were rejected in October, and on the 27th of that month the Supreme Court began hearings; it is expected to hand down its judgement on 9 December.

In early November, Sir Arnold Amet, himself a former chief justice and attorney general in the Somare government, claimed that the O'Neill-Namah government was planning to sack the chief justice Sir Salamo Injia. The claim was denied by O'Neill, but a few days later, on 10 November, Namah, as acting prime minister, announced that the chief justice had been suspended to face a range of charges, some dating back to 2009, including contempt of court, mismanagement of court finances and conflict of interest. Whatever the basis for such charges, there was a widespread feeling that Injia's suspension was a payback for his rejection of the government's move to have the East Sepik's challenge dismissed and an attempt to disrupt the Supreme Court's proceedings in the case. The PNG Law Society accused the government of undermining the judiciary and the office

of the chief justice, and Amet described the government's action as 'a blatant and dangerous attempt to derail the Supreme Court challenge' (see *Post-Courier, National* 11 November 2011). The Supreme Court retaliated by ordering the arrest of Namah and attorney general Marat to face charges of contempt of court.

With the NA split between government and opposition, the tussle for party leadership continued. In June, the decision of the Enga branch of the NA to suspend Abal was endorsed by a meeting of provincial executives from the Highlands Region. Twelve of the thirteen NA MPs from the Highlands did not attend this meeting, but they supported Abal. At a caucus meeting in Goroka in July, attended by deputy party leaders from the Highlands, Southern and Islands regions (but not by Abal), Polye was reportedly elected as party leader, but this was rejected by the NA president, Simon Kaiwi. Abal convened a rival meeting of the parliamentary wing of the NA in Moresby but it lacked a quorum. Polye told a meeting in Goroka that he would "strive to take the NA leadership despite all odds ... [and] ... to become the Prime Minister of this country", but Sani Rambai (NA member for Mul-Baiyer and a founding member of the NA), called on the two MPs to settle their differences, saying he was "pissed off" with two MPs' display of "Enga politics" (*National* and *Post-Courier* 1 August 2011). Following the election of O'Neill as prime minister on 2 August, it was announced that Polye was the leader of the NA in the new government, but Abal and his NA supporters refused to recognise Polye's claim to be leader of the party and declined to attend a party caucus meeting in Minj on 8 August, which, though attended by only nineteen of the parliamentary party's 42 members, voted to appoint Polye as party leader, replacing Sir Michael Somare. Abal and former attorney general Amet rejected the decision as not conforming to the party's constitution. In September it was reported that the 20 NA MPs, led by Polye, who had crossed to vote with the then opposition had been served with notice of expulsion from the party. Subsequent to this, Polye claimed that another five NA MPs had joined the government. Polye petitioned the registrar of political parties for recognition as leader of the NA but his petition was rejected and the matter referred back to the party (the registrar's letter is reproduced in *National* 23 September 2011). However, the speaker of parliament, true to his partisan form, accepted Polye's claim to leadership. Within the NA there were also calls for Kaiwi to resign, and on 19 October it was reported that a special general meeting of the NA had voted out party president

Kaiwi and other members of the national executive. The party remains divided, with 20 MPs in government and 21 in opposition and the leadership still contested, and it seems unlikely that there will be any reconciliation before the 2012 election.

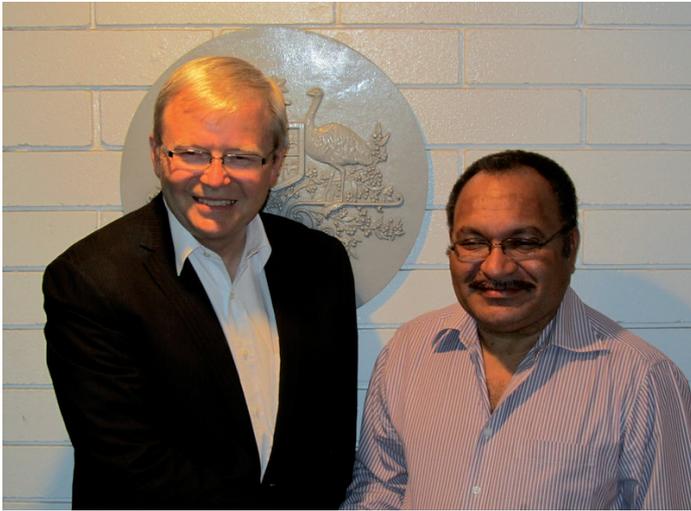
Early in October it was reported that the People's Action Party (PAP), led by Gabriel Kapris (Maprik), had joined the O'Neill government, aligning itself with Namah's PNG Party (though assuring its supporters that it would field PAP candidates in 2012). The PAP had been a senior partner of Somare's NA in 2007, but PAP MP Tony Aimo (Ambunti-Dreikikir) said the party had switched to the new government because it "did not want the people of East Sepik to be marginalized" (*National* 4 October 2011).

The Supreme Court has yet to make a ruling on the challenge to the election of Peter O'Neill on 2 August. But even if the court were to rule that the election was not valid, it is not clear what would happen next: with the former coalition split, a clear majority of MPs behind O'Neill, and a vote of no confidence ruled out, Somare would at best head a minority of MPs in the dying days of the 2007–2012 parliament.⁷

PRIME MINISTER O'NEILL

O'Neill was elected to the national parliament in 2002, as leader of the one-MP People's Solidarity Party (PSP). The PSP merged with the People's National Congress (PNC) in 2002 and O'Neill later successfully challenged party founder Sir Bill Skate for parliamentary leadership of the PNC, subsequently becoming opposition leader in the national parliament. In 2004, as opposition leader, frustrated by the Somare government's actions to thwart a vote of no confidence, O'Neill announced that the opposition would boycott parliament until Somare and speaker Nape were removed from office. In 2007, he was re-elected, and the PNC became a member of the governing coalition. O'Neill joined his former adversaries as minister for public service and later became finance and treasury minister.

O'Neill, of mixed Australian – PNG Southern Highlands parentage, is an accountant by training and had run a profitable real estate business. At one stage, he was head of Pacific Finance, which managed the state-owned Motor Vehicle Insurance Corporation, PNG Banking Corporation and National Provident Fund. In 2002, he was named in the report of a major inquiry into mismanagement of the National Provident Fund as having benefited from the proceeds of fraudulent transactions and was one of several people whom the inquiry recommended for prosecution. In



Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd and PNG's Prime Minister Peter O'Neill meet at the High Commission residence during Mr Rudd's visit to PNG, 2011. Photo courtesy of office of the Hon. Kevin Rudd MP.

2005, he was in court facing eight charges of misappropriation and conspiracy, but the Waigani Committal Court dismissed charges due to “lack of credible evidence”.

In 2005, O'Neill was the architect of a District Authorities Act, designed to shift power from the national and provincial governments to districts; the legislation was passed by parliament but never certified, and therefore never came into effect.

Australia's foreign minister, Kevin Rudd, visited PNG in October 2011 and Prime Minister O'Neill returned the visit later that month. Relations between the two are cordial. There is agreement on the need to “refocus” Australia–PNG relations away from development assistance towards economic cooperation (though it is not immediately clear what that would entail, with Australia promising continuing support for health, education, infrastructure, and law and order) and O'Neill appears to have been receptive to Australian proposals to re-establish asylum-seeker processing in Manus Province.

O'Neill is smart and energetic, and since coming to office has pushed forward a number of legislative initiatives that had been languishing under the Somare government, including the establishment of the new Hela and Jiwaka provinces, and the creation of 22 reserved seats for women in the national parliament. He has expressed his government's support for the LNG project and the mining sector, and promised free education up to grade 10. And in late August, it was reported that he had allocated PGK100 million for infrastructure in the Southern Highlands Province (*National* 30 August 2011). There have been a number of changes at senior levels in

the public service, and the new government has vowed to take firm action against corruption, initiating an inquiry into the Department of National Planning and Monitoring and pursuing charges against several alleged offenders, notably including the former finance minister, Patrick Pruaitch, the former national planning minister, Paul Tiensten (NA, Pomio), both close Somare supporters, and the former energy and petroleum minister Francis Potape.

Even before the events of July–August, PNG was moving into “election mode”, with national elections due in June 2012. Since the constitution rules out votes of no confidence in the twelve months prior to a national election, O'Neill is secure as prime minister, unless a legal challenge to his election on 2 August succeeds, and he will be keen to establish his credentials as a capable, reformist leader, able to deal with the expected economic boom associated with the ongoing development of PNG's natural gas resources, which are concentrated in his home province of Southern Highlands. If his campaign against corruption removes a few significant political opponents, that will be a bonus. But while O'Neill seems assured of re-election in Ialibu-Pangia, there are too many uncertainties in PNG politics to predict that he will still be prime minister after the 2012 elections. What does seem certain is that the government which emerges after the 2012 election—like every other government in PNG's history—will be a coalition. New parties are already emerging in the run-up to the election and which party will emerge with the greatest number of seats in 2012 is almost impossible to predict. As in July–August 2011, there will no shortage of contenders for the position of prime minister.

THE SOMARE LEGACY

On the eve of PNG's independence in 1975, there were many who predicted that the country would quickly lapse into chaos or succumb to a military coup. In fact, under the governments of Sir Michael Somare (1972–1980 and 1982–1985) and Sir Julius Chan (1980–1982), the country did well: strong democratic institutions were established, a number of reformist social policies were pursued, and the economy was fairly strong. From the early 1980s, however, successive governments were impacted by economic downturn, growing problems of law and order in both the towns and the countryside, declining capacity to deliver government services, and the rebellion on Bougainville.

Aided by an improved economic climate and perhaps by institutional reforms initiated by the Morauta

government (1999–2002), on returning to office in 2002 Somare presided over a period of economic recovery and greater political stability, though problems of poor service delivery and less-than-good governance persisted. There were also growing complaints of executive dominance of parliament and the public service, and corruption at all levels of government. Though Somare himself has maintained an essentially simple lifestyle, he has certainly not been well served by several of his ministers, but there have also been frequent accusations on blog sites against the Somare family and complaints of a “Sepik tsunami” swamping public offices.

Despite such negativity, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare is widely revered as “the father of the nation” and even amongst his critics there is a feeling that he has been badly treated by his current political opponents, who include a number of his former allies.

Perhaps one of Somare’s failings has been his apparent reluctance to groom a successor. In the 1980s, two prominent MPs with leadership aspirations left the Pangu Pati, of which Somare was then leader, and formed their own parties: Sir Anthony Siaguru, an East Sepik residing in Port Moresby, established the League for National Advancement, but failed to gain re-election; Western Highlander Paias Wingti founded the People’s Democratic Movement and went on to serve two terms as prime minister (becoming the first prime minister from the populous and often volatile Highlands Region). Prior to the 2007 national election, Somare had a falling out with NA member and respected finance minister Bart Philemon, over the issue of succession and Philemon’s criticisms of government decisions. As result, Philemon left NA and started a new party—the New Generation Party—which opposed the NA in the 2007 election (Philemon was re-elected but his party polled poorly). Then, as noted above, in 2010 deputy prime minister Puka Temu left the government and joined the opposition. Finally, Somare’s appointment of Abal to replace Polye as deputy prime minister and subsequently acting prime minister sparked factional rivalry within the NA, which culminated in the party’s fragmentation in July–August 2011. It is commonly believed that Sir Michael had hoped to see his son Arthur (the member for Angoram) succeed him, but Arthur Somare is currently before a leadership tribunal, facing charges rather more serious than those his father faced, and has alienated a number of his NA colleagues; in any case there is little chance that Papua New Guineans would have accepted another prime minister

from the same province, let alone the same family. If the NA fails to get the numbers in 2012, that also may become part of the Somare legacy.

Whatever happens in 2012, it seems likely that we are seeing a significant generational transition in PNG politics. This is probably unlikely to cause significant changes in policy direction, though it might cause some further shift in the national gaze from Australia, north and west towards Asia, and it is quite likely to encourage further changes in political style, along the lines we have seen since 2002, especially if, as seems likely, the next prime minister is from the Highlands.

This briefing paper was prepared by Ron May.

ENDNOTES

I am grateful to Bill Standish for his comments on a draft of this paper.

1. In 2002 “failed elections” were declared in six of the nine electorates of the Southern Highlands Province. New elections were held in those electorates in 2003.
2. In October 2009, the opposition withdrew the motion, saying it had no confidence in the integrity of the process (*Post-Courier* 22 October 2009).
3. SC1057. *SC Ref No.11 of 2008. Special Reference Pursuant to Constitution, Section 19. In the Matter of the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates.*
4. Pruaitch had been given the finance and treasury portfolio in 2007 but was suspended in May 2010 to face a leadership tribunal over charges of misconduct, including misuse of District Support grants. In May 2011 the suspension was overturned by the Supreme Court, though the misconduct charges were still outstanding. With the 2012 election approaching, the NA was doubtless keen to reclaim control over Finance and Treasury.
5. Marat had been appointed attorney general in 2007 but had been forced by Somare to resign in May 2010 when he spoke out against proposed legislation which was generally seen as diluting the powers of the Ombudsman Commission.
6. Under Section 104(2)(d) of the constitution, a member who, without leave, misses three consecutive sittings of

parliament is disqualified from office. In fact, Somare was granted leave in May and missed only two sittings, in June and August. In any case, there is provision for a member so charged to provide an explanation for his/her absences, an opportunity which Somare was not given.

7. An editorial in the *Post-Courier* on 5 August 2011, while condemning the speaker's action on 2 August, said: "what happened on Tuesday may well be unconstitutional but the outcome of the vote on Tuesday speaks for itself. It would have been morally wrong for the former Government to continue to hold onto office".

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