

Pacific Islands Forum meets amid escalating US war drive against China

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The 54th Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) met over five days from September 8 in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands. It was attended by representatives from 18 member states: the regional imperialist powers Australia and New Zealand, and 16 small, impoverished colonial territories and semi-colonial countries.

The summit took place amid soaring geopolitical tensions in the Pacific, fuelled by the advanced US preparations for war against China. The US and its allies Australia and NZ are militarising the entire region and are pressuring the Pacific countries to cut economic and diplomatic ties with China.

A tense dispute erupted last month over Solomon Islands Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele's decision to bar all "dialogue partners"—21 governments from outside the Pacific region, including the US, China and Taiwan—from participating in the PIF summit.

A US State Department spokesperson told Reuters it was "disappointed" with the announcement and pointedly declared that all partners should attend "including Taiwan." The US and its allies are seeking to provoke a conflict with China over Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a renegade province of China.

The Solomon Islands switched its diplomatic relations from Taiwan to China in 2019, and in 2022 signed a security and policing deal with Beijing. This prompted a hysterical outburst and threats of a US-Australia regime change operation if China moved to establish a military presence there.

New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters told Radio NZ on August 14 that the decision to bar the dialogue partners from the PIF summit was the result of "outsiders"—a clear reference to Beijing—"telling us who we can have as guests."

The governments of Tuvalu and Samoa initially

threatened to not attend the PIF summit in protest against the Manele government's decision. Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands and Palau are the only Pacific Island countries that maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan instead of mainland China.

The PIF summit's final communiqué, following what was reportedly an intense debate, confirmed that Taiwan should be included as a "development partner" in the future. This will be viewed as a victory by Washington and its allies, which sees the PIF as an important mechanism to counter China in the Pacific.

The incoming chair of the PIF, Palau President Surangel Whipps Jr, whose country will host next year's summit, is one of the region's most bellicose anti-China hawks.

Just before the PIF summit, on September 10, Whipps Jr was a keynote speaker at a US Indo-Pacific Command military conference in Hawaii, where he declared, "we are under constant threat; I might venture to say we are already at war." He called for increased US Navy visits to counter China and stated, according to the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, that "China cannot remain the No. 1 investor in our private sector. That must change."

Whipps Jr.'s statements were widely reported in the Australian corporate media, which published dozens of articles in the lead-up and during the PIF summit claiming that Beijing was using multi-billion dollar aid and security deals to try and take over the Solomon Islands.

A frothing article in the *Australian* newspaper on September 12, headlined "China's insidious grip on the Pacific," claimed that Beijing was creating a "surveillance state" by collecting data on Solomon Islands citizens through its community policing initiative. Australia's opposition foreign affairs

spokeswoman Michaelia Cash called it “a very concerning development.”

All of this is thoroughly hypocritical and turns reality upside down. Australia, NZ and the US dominate military and policing operations across the Pacific including in the Solomon Islands, where Australia has dozens of police officers stationed and recently supplied the local police with a \$5.2 million fleet of 61 security vehicles.

Australia has invested \$200 million to train police in Papua New Guinea, and has effectively taken over security and defence policy for the tiny island nations of Tuvalu and Nauru.

At the PIF summit, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his Fijian counterpart Sitiveni Rabuka announced they would negotiate a new bilateral security treaty. Albanese said the deal could result in “increased interoperability, the sort of training that we are seeing with the Pacific Policing Initiative [PPI], being expanded to increased engagement between our defence forces.”

The PPI, which was approved at last year’s PIF summit, is a multinational police force headquartered in Brisbane, Australia, capable of deploying police across the Pacific to counter China’s influence and prepare to quell growing popular unrest.

En route to Honiara, Albanese stopped in Vanuatu, seeking to cement a \$A500 million agreement to replace a security pact scrapped by Vanuatu in 2022, but left Port Vila empty-handed. Vanuatu has been reluctant to agree to any exclusive rights over security policies like those obtained by Canberra in its recent neo-colonial deals with Tuvalu and PNG.

At this year’s summit, Pacific leaders endorsed the so-called “Ocean of Peace Declaration,” purportedly committing the region to “peace, sovereignty, and climate justice.”

Recalling the bloody battles fought in the Pacific during World War II, Manele declared, “The Ocean of Peace Declaration is a reclamation of our sovereignty and our shared destiny. It is a solemn vow that our seas, air, and lands will never again be drawn into the vortex of great power rivalry.”

Such statements fly in the face of reality. Practically all the countries who signed the “peace” document are making far-reaching security and military deals with the imperialist powers.

Fiji’s Rabuka has been the key architect and promoter of the “Ocean of Peace” for the past two years. But last November Fiji entered talks with the US aimed at strengthening military ties through a Status of Forces Agreement to enable the Pentagon to station troops in Fiji. Rabuka pledged to “work closely” with the Trump administration.

During an official visit to India last month, Rabuka told local media that, “strategically,” China does “not need to be in the Pacific.” Fiji signed anti-China military pacts with Australia in 2020, and New Zealand in 2023.

Along with Prime Minister James Marape of Papua New Guinea, Rabuka is now preparing to welcome a provocative visit next month by a high-level Israeli delegation in defiance of widespread popular opposition to the Gaza genocide. Israel regards the two main Pacific regimes as “great friends” after they both opened embassies in Jerusalem.

The “Ocean of Peace Declaration” also called for “bold, decisive and transformative action” to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees celsius above pre-industrial levels. The Pacific governments are well aware that the imperialist powers, even as they spend record sums of money on war, are taking no action to stop catastrophic climate change. Already this is leading to more frequent destructive events and threatens to completely wipe out low-lying islands like Tuvalu.

The intensifying confrontation with China and the militarisation of the Pacific by the US and its allies must serve as a warning to the working class in Australia, New Zealand, and across the Pacific region. The only way to prevent a catastrophic third world war is through a unified struggle by workers throughout the Pacific and internationally based on socialism, to put an end to the capitalist system which is the root cause of imperialist war.



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