

Pacific foreign ministers fail to agree on statement condemning Chinese missile test

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Pacific foreign ministers meeting in Fiji on August 7 failed to agree on a joint statement condemning China's recent test of a nuclear-capable ballistic missile in the region. New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters lashed out angrily, accusing some governments of appeasing China.

China test-fired an intercontinental ballistic missile across the Pacific on July 6, landing in a patch of ocean between the Solomon Islands, Nauru (now renamed the Republic of Naoero) and Tuvalu. Tuvalu—a tiny island nation whose defence policy is effectively controlled by Australia—demanded a collective Pacific response and criticised the lack of prior notice and alleged “intimidation” by external powers.

It was the third test carried out by China in the Pacific, the previous two being in 1980 and 2024. China's People's Liberation Army insisted that the test was routine, complied with international law and did not target any particular country.

A cacophony of criticism erupted from the US and its allies. Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong both branded the test as “destabilising to the region.” Peters bluntly warned: “We as a region should not sit by and allow such tests to become normalised or routine.” The governments of Japan and the Philippines also issued strongly worded condemnations.

The US State Department said it had monitored China's test and absurdly declared: “At a time when the United States is working harder than ever to prevent nuclear proliferation, China is doing the opposite... We continue to urge China to engage in meaningful arms control discussions.”

The US military, which is engaged in criminal wars against Iran and Russia, regularly conducts ballistic missile tests in the Pacific, with two already this year.

The US has the world's largest nuclear weapons arsenal, which is currently being upgraded.

The dispute is an expression of the sharp geopolitical tensions created by the advanced US-led preparations for war against China. New Zealand and Australia are seeking to block China's growing economic and diplomatic influence in the Pacific and are presenting Beijing in increasingly hysterical terms as a military threat. While using aid to pressure Pacific states, they are militarising the region and forcing them to cut economic and diplomatic ties with Beijing.

The annual foreign ministers' meeting is held prior to the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) leaders' summit and plays a key role in establishing its agenda. This year the 18-member PIF will meet in Palau for a week from August 30. Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands are semi-colonies of the US and host critical US military facilities, aimed at China. Palau President Surangel Whipps Jr. is one of the region's most bellicose anti-China hawks.

Before the foreign ministers' meeting, Australia and New Zealand made it clear they intended to bully the Pacific states into line over China's missile test. Arriving in Fiji, Peters told reporters the Pacific had missed an opportunity to issue a joint statement at the time, accusing unnamed countries of “granting outside partners' wishes rather than those of the Pacific Islands Forum.”

Announcing that NZ would push for a strong statement condemning China, Peters provocatively declared: “We'll see whether logic prevails in this debate, or whether the debate has already been settled by people having a predetermined position from which they will not move.”

According to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), “Wong also pressed the meeting to

issue a joint statement on the test, telling Pacific ministers that they needed to display ‘leadership’ on the issue.”

The failure of the meeting to reach agreement was met with barely concealed fury in Canberra and Wellington. The ABC reported that sources had said Kiribati and Naoero, which have both built closer ties with Beijing, “continued to block consensus on the statement... despite broad support for it in the room.”

Kiribati recognised China in 2019 and Nauru/Naoero followed suit in 2024, severing diplomatic ties with Taiwan. PIF Secretary General Baron Waqa, however, told Reuters the ministers’ meeting discussed the missile test “at quite some length” but neither country blocked a statement. “They just honestly placed their position so that others can consider and see how best they all contribute,” he said.

Naoero’s Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Russ Joseph Kun told NZ’s *The Post* that the US “is launching rockets three or four times a year. ... Why is there so much noise on one rocket that flew out of China? That’s a bit unfair on our strategic partners... there’s two partners doing the same thing, why are we criticising the other one?”

A “frustrated” Peters declared afterwards that two countries “were seeking to use the need for consensus as a veto provision.” In his usual bellicose manner, Peters declared: “We made it very clear that we didn’t think outsiders (i.e. China) should be telling insiders—that’s us, we’ve been here for thousands of years—what our position should be.”

In April, Peters signed a Security Declaration with the Cook Islands following a year-long rift over a Cooks’ commercial deal with China. Peters had blocked \$NZ30 million worth of aid which was vital for the functioning of basic public services in the territory. The declaration effectively asserted NZ colonial domination, giving its military unimpeded access to the land, territory and airspace of the Cook Islands.

Peters hypocritically told the media the countries refusing to condemn China’s test “didn’t actually lay out any reasons, apart from their disagreement, and not wishing for us to make the clear statement such as ‘we are opposed to missiles being fired into the Pacific’.” No such statement has been issued condemning the frequent US tests and military exercises, which NZ and

Australia fully support.

No doubt pressure will continue to be applied by the imperialist powers. According to the ABC, the PIF members have agreed to continue “discussing the issue,” aiming to reach an agreement before the PIF Leaders’ meeting. At a contentious 2025 summit in Honiara, Taiwan’s observer status was blocked against strong opposition by the US, Australia and New Zealand. PIF Secretary Waqa has confirmed that Taiwan will attend the meeting this month, despite China’s objections.

Solomon Islands Prime Minister Matthew Wale, the current PIF chair, has foreshadowed he will be promoting the concept of a regional security agreement at the forum. Selected as PM by the parliament in May, Wale announced a sharp shift from the country’s previous ties with Beijing. Meeting with Albanese in June, he announced negotiations on a comprehensive treaty with Australia.

Canberra has already signed a web of strategic agreements, including with Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu, Nauru/Naoero, Vanuatu and, most recently, Fiji which give it sweeping rights over the islands’ foreign policy decisions. The agreements significantly escalate the extent to which the South Pacific states are being dragged into the US-led network of anti-China pacts.



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