

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) ended with no agreed communique and unresolved tensions between the United States and China on open display.

Lowy Institute's Pacific Islands program director, Jonathan Pryke, who observed the forum in Port Moresby, said: "it is distressing for all parties that they weren't able to find common ground. There is a fear that we're losing the middle here."

Pryke told The Conversation "the desire for a convergence of China into the international liberal order seems like a bit of a fantasy now."

But he says "whilst the summit has left everyone on a pretty sour note" because of the state of the communique "it is still important for all the middle powers to find more ways in which they can communicate and work together to maintain this liberal order."

On Australia partnering with America to develop a naval base on Manus, he said "the devil will be in the details ... but it does send a strong symbolic message to China."

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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