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# POLICING PARTNERSHIPS IN THE PACIFIC

CHINA'S LAW-ENFORCEMENT  
COOPERATION WITH PACIFIC  
ISLAND COUNTRIES

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MARCH 2026

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank the many Pacific Islanders, as well as foreign law enforcement, government officials, non-governmental and multilateral organizations, journalists, academics and analysts who, by sharing their knowledge, insight and contacts have informed this report; Ali Tuhonuku for his assistance in Solomon Islands; and Lin Sae-Phoo and Mihai Sora who have acted as external reviewers. The authors would also like to thank Louise Taylor and Matt Herbert at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) for their feedback, and the GI-TOC Publications team.

Sections of this report were drafted with generative AI assistance (Microsoft Copilot and ChatGPT-5.2). All analysis, fact-checking and conclusions are the authors' own.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past two decades, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has significantly expanded its role as a provider of foreign law enforcement assistance and policing cooperation. What began primarily as targeted support linked to diplomatic competition and counterterrorism has evolved into a more systematic and geographically dispersed portfolio of activities. Today, the PRC supplies equipment, infrastructure, training and, in some cases, operational support to police forces across Asia, Africa, Latin America and, increasingly, the Pacific Islands.

In the Pacific, this engagement has grown markedly in the last ten years in both scope and political sensitivity. Initial efforts centred on infrastructure development and training exchanges, but in several countries these have developed into more sustained and, at times, operationally embedded relationships. As a result, policing cooperation – traditionally viewed as a largely technical area – has become more closely intertwined with broader questions of influence, security and geopolitics in the region.

This trajectory reflects broader global patterns in China's law enforcement engagement, which is shaped by a combination of external and domestic objectives. Internationally, assistance serves to cultivate diplomatic partnerships, expand political influence, secure support in multilateral forums, and reinforce state authority abroad. At the same time, it advances domestic priorities: protecting Chinese nationals and investments overseas, engaging and monitoring diaspora communities, countering transnational threats and projecting the image of a state capable of safeguarding its citizens globally. Under Xi Jinping's Comprehensive National Security Concept and the Global Security Initiative (GSI), the boundary between internal and external security has increasingly blurred, positioning foreign law enforcement cooperation as an instrument through which Beijing seeks to shape its external environment in ways that reinforce domestic stability.

Against this backdrop, this report finds that Chinese policing assistance and cooperation in the South Pacific is:

- Politically differentiated, ranging from infrastructure grants to formal security frameworks.
- Institutionally layered, combining central direction with provincial actors and diaspora-linked networks.
- Strategically consequential, reshaping regional security dynamics without necessarily displacing traditional partners.
- Operationally assertive in some contexts.



**FIGURE 1** Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Island countries and territories.

NOTE: This study focuses on Chinese policing activities in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

## Overall assessment

PRC policing engagement in the South Pacific should not be viewed as a uniform security takeover nor as purely symbolic diplomacy. It is better understood as a flexible, politically attuned and strategically cumulative approach. In some contexts, it remains modest and technically supportive in nature; in others it has become deeply embedded and geopolitically consequential.

The central dynamic, therefore, is not replacement but rather recalibration. China's expanding role has altered expectations, accelerated competition and raised the political stakes of what was once treated as a technical domain.

## Scope and objectives

This report examines the scale and nature of law enforcement assistance and policing cooperation provided by the PRC in the South Pacific. It places these activities within China's broader strategic approach and looks at how they are unfolding across different Pacific Island contexts.

It also explores how China's expanding role interacts with the longstanding involvement of traditional policing partners in the region, and what this may mean for sovereignty, accountability and community security in Pacific Island countries.

## Methodology

This report employs a mixed methodology. As part of the research process, approximately 60 semi-structured interviews were carried out in 2024, late 2025 and early 2026 with key informants (including some group interviews with communities) across Oceania. Most were in person, with some conducted online. Some experts and officials based in Europe and the US were consulted remotely. Barring few exceptions, most interviewees requested anonymity owing to the sensitive nature of the information and diplomatic considerations. In some cases, they are referenced in the text using broad descriptions, e.g. 'foreign law enforcement officer based in country X'. In others, when total anonymity was requested, only a numerical identifier was provided to avoid the risk of the individual being identified.

The research also leveraged the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)'s global Network of Experts by inviting members to respond to an online questionnaire on Chinese law enforcement assistance and cooperation.

This information was then complemented by a review of academic books and articles, policy reports, government statements and reports, declassified documents and media articles in both English and Mandarin. Quantitative data on Chinese aid was drawn from AidData's 'Tracking Chinese Development Finance.'<sup>1</sup>

This report uses 'People's Republic of China', 'PRC' and 'China' interchangeably. When discussing Pacific Islanders' perceptions of China and its assistance, the authors acknowledge that, in this respect, 'China' is not a monolithic entity. Perceptions are shaped by the activities of Chinese embassies, Chinese Police Liaison Teams and, Pacific Islanders who live alongside Chinese diasporas. These perceptions vary and change over time. Importantly, there are many Chinese diasporas, including descendants of earlier migrants and more recent arrivals. While a detailed exploration of these different facets is beyond the scope of this report, they are worth keeping in mind.

As with most qualitative research, the findings should be interpreted in light of the availability of interviewees and the evolving nature of policing cooperation in the region.

## Key findings

### ■ **PRC engagement varies in depth but is expanding in ambition**

While Fiji (past) and Solomon Islands (currently) represent the most documented and politically sensitive cases, smaller countries such as the Cook Islands have received sustained policing-related infrastructure and political engagement. The absence of formal security pacts does not necessarily equate to limited influence; incremental support can carry cumulative strategic weight over time.

### ■ **The Solomon Islands case marks a qualitative shift**

Solomon Islands has emerged as China's most prominent policing partner in the Pacific. The relationship includes training, equipment, advisory presence and high-level political signalling. This marks a shift from Fiji's earlier role as Beijing's closest policing interlocutor and demonstrates how such partnerships change over time in response to domestic and geopolitical factors.

### ■ **Evidence suggests growing operational assertiveness**

Interviews conducted for this report include accounts that Chinese Police Liaison Team personnel have, in some instances, sought to discourage or intimidate law enforcement advisers from other

countries from operating in the same environment. While such behaviour is not uniform, it signals a willingness in certain contexts to compete directly at the operational level, rather than simply coexisting alongside traditional partners.

- **Provincial and diaspora linkages matter**

Chinese policing engagement frequently involves actors from the Guangdong and Fujian provinces. This reflects long-standing migration ties and China's broader use of subnational actors in advancing external objectives. This layered model blends diaspora familiarity, provincial initiative and central strategic direction.

- **Traditional partners are adapting rather than withdrawing**

China's growing presence has not resulted in the wholesale displacement of Australia, New Zealand or other longstanding 'traditional' policing partners in the region. Instead, it has transformed policing cooperation into a more openly contested space. Pacific governments are largely diversifying partnerships rather than choosing exclusive alignments.



## INTRODUCTION

The ways in which the scope of China's international policing activities has expanded has generated concern among what can be termed the traditional partners of Pacific Island countries, namely Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Japan, European states and others. Critics argue that Chinese assistance may bolster illiberal governance practices, weaken rule-of-law norms and introduce surveillance technologies or operational models that are misaligned with community-oriented policing traditions.<sup>2</sup> Others fear that such cooperation could create dependencies or provide leverage in times of political crisis.

Yet reactions to China's security engagement in the Pacific must also be understood in a global perspective. Similar debates accompanied Beijing's early 2000s expansion into Africa and other regions, where warnings of 'no strings attached' assistance undermining governance standards coexisted with frustration among recipient states at what they perceived as paternalistic or self-interested Western criticism. In many cases, China's engagement did not displace traditional partners but rather diversified the range of options available to host governments.

The Pacific Islands exemplify this dynamic interplay of policing assistance, geopolitics and local agency. Pacific governments are not passive recipients of external security support: they actively balance relationships, negotiate terms, and pursue assistance that aligns with their priorities. Their choices are shaped by fiscal constraints, capacity gaps, domestic political pressures and the need to maintain sovereignty amid intensifying geopolitical competition.

China's approach in the Pacific has been marked by opportunism and pragmatism. Engagement has often accelerated in moments of unrest or political crisis, when governments face acute public order challenges. Offers of assistance are typically framed as respectful of sovereignty and free of governance conditionality, and yet frequently tied, explicitly or implicitly, to the protection of Chinese nationals and businesses. At the same time, Beijing has shown signs of learning and adaptation across different Pacific contexts. In some countries, it has taken a more assertive posture; in others, it has adjusted its approach in recognition of local sensitivities, entrenched partnerships with traditional donors, or resistance to certain policing models.

It would be erroneous, however, to frame PRC assistance solely through the lens of strategic competition or risk. For many Pacific police forces operating under severe resource constraints, Chinese support has filled tangible gaps, providing vehicles, forensic equipment, infrastructure, training opportunities, and rapid-response capabilities at little or no financial cost to the recipient (although the

wider relationship between China, including level of indebtedness of Pacific countries should not be ignored). Exposure to different policing systems can also offer professional development opportunities, even where models diverge.

But, in the end, law enforcement assistance is not merely technical: it is inherently political. It builds networks between ministries, shapes institutional cultures, and contributes to longer-term norm diffusion. In politically sensitive cases – such as extradition, cyber investigations, public order management or diaspora-related matters – relationships forged through training and support can translate into operational cooperation.

## Definitions

### Law enforcement assistance

Strategies, policies, programmes and activities aimed at building, supporting or reforming security providers with law enforcement authority, generally including police units, gendarmeries and coast guard units.

### Policing cooperation

Operational support provided between law enforcement in separate states or jurisdictions, often geared towards criminal investigation, intelligence sharing or fugitive arrest. ■



# GLOBAL CONTEXT: CHINESE LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION

**H**istorically, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has not been a major provider of foreign law enforcement assistance or a significant exponent of policing cooperation. This stands in contrast to its broader history of military aid and support, including providing weaponry to states and insurgent groups in Asia and Africa.<sup>3</sup>

However, the PRC's involvement in foreign law enforcement assistance and international police cooperation has shifted substantially over the last two decades. Beginning in the early 2000s, and accelerating after the unveiling of the country's 'Comprehensive National Security Concept' in 2014, the PRC has expanded both the geographic scope and the scale of its assistance activities.<sup>4</sup> Training for foreign police forces was actively promoted. Yunnan Police College led these efforts in 2002, becoming the first institution to deliver such programmes, initially focused on counternarcotics training for Mekong police forces (Fiji would later benefit from it, as discussed in the next chapter).<sup>5</sup>

The country's interests and objectives in providing such assistance appear to be shifting. Two decades ago, they focused largely on diplomatic competition with Taiwan and counterterrorism. Today, they increasingly centre on protecting overseas workers, monitoring diaspora, security in neighbouring regions, and great-power competition with the US.

Further, when assessing the Chinese approach to foreign law enforcement assistance and policing cooperation, it is important to do so within the wider context of Beijing's strategic priorities beyond the ever-present implicit priority of furthering the Party's interests. Chief among these is the pursuit of a prosperous, strong and secure China.<sup>6</sup>

To pursue these goals, China seeks to secure influence internationally, secure access to natural resources, markets and technologies, address traditional and nontraditional threats and build relationships with partners that would support Chinese policies – especially in an era of intensifying geopolitical competition.

Law enforcement assistance contributes to these objectives and is reflective of the PRC's increasingly global vision and expanding concept of security. Indeed, even operational cooperation, such as police training, carries political significance.<sup>7</sup> This broader context helps explain Chinese law enforcement assistance in the Pacific.

Fourth Ministerial Dialogue on Police Capacity Building and Cooperation between China and the Pacific Island countries, 18 September 2025. Photo: Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of Tonga



## China's grand-strategy, foreign law enforcement assistance and policing cooperation

Since assuming power in November 2012, China's President Xi Jinping has promoted a more comprehensive and aggressive approach to international relations. While the most visible elements of this approach involve increased diplomatic or military activity, particularly in the PRC's periphery, a less noticeable though important element has been law enforcement assistance and policing cooperation.

China's current approach to foreign assistance and law enforcement was shaped by the 'Comprehensive National Security Concept', (总体国家安全观) introduced by President Xi Jinping in April 2014.<sup>8</sup> It later became a central element of the PRC's Global Security Initiative (GSI).

A key pillar of the Comprehensive National Security Concept is political security, centred on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and President Xi. Since 2014, the concept has expanded substantially. It now encompasses 21 types of security, emphasizes nontraditional threats and underscores the link between internal and external security issues.<sup>9</sup>

This emphasis on the link between internal and external security is not entirely new. One academic noted that 'in the Chinese framework, internal security is the end toward which grand strategy is directed'.<sup>10</sup> However, the importance of this approach has grown substantially under President Xi.

As one China expert said, 'I think a lot of what the PRC is currently doing is driven by this internal vision of security, that sees a lot of the risks to the party as threatened by external forces that come back into China and create these destabilizing effects—figuring out how to reshape the international environment around their periphery so there's a lessened risk.'<sup>11</sup>

As part of this evolving concept of security, President Xi announced the GSI in 2022. Initially categorized as part of a trio alongside the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), the GSI aims:

To eliminate the root causes of international conflicts, improve global security governance, encourage joint international efforts to bring more stability and certainty to a volatile and changing era, and promote durable peace and development in the world.<sup>12</sup>

The GSI is widely viewed as a vehicle for confronting and limiting US security architecture and influence globally.<sup>13</sup> In part, it seeks to foster the narrative that ‘the United States and its allies are the problem and China is the solution when it comes to international security’.<sup>14</sup>

However, expanding China’s international law enforcement activity is also a key part of the initiative, especially with regards to developing countries, which are key targets of GSI promotion efforts.<sup>15</sup> Xi has emphasized the need to strengthen law enforcement capacities as part of the GSI, and promoted training opportunities for regional law enforcement officials in the PRC.

Reflecting this, the GSI concept paper calls for a ‘global training system to train for developing countries more law enforcement officers’ and ‘more exchanges and cooperation among university-level military and police academies’.<sup>16</sup> A year later, in 2024, State Councillor and Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong announced China’s offer to train 3 000 foreign law enforcement personnel in the following twelve months.<sup>17</sup>

The GSI is considered ‘Xi’s favoured vehicle for externalizing the comprehensive national security concept’, strongly suggesting that at least at the strategic level, international law enforcement assistance and police cooperation have substantial high-level interest and drive.<sup>18</sup>

Although the GSI remains a relatively new initiative and thus is to some extent still coming into focus, when it comes to law enforcement, there is growing activity. References to the GSI and law enforcement assistance have appeared more frequently in official Chinese statements and documents regarding Chinese cooperation with other countries, regional bodies, and organizations. The Joint Statement of the Third China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in 2025, for example, contains a note that ‘Pacific Island Countries acknowledge the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping’, as well as identifying ‘police training’ as one of multiple cooperation priorities.<sup>19</sup>

These strategic priorities provide the broader framework within which China’s law enforcement engagement in the Pacific has developed.

## **National security salience of foreign law enforcement assistance**

A number of separate national security interests appear to shape how China selects those countries for which it provides law enforcement assistance and police cooperation.

The first involves geopolitical goals and efforts to strengthen the PRC’s role as a key international actor. In this context, law enforcement assistance is viewed as a key tool within a broader influence-building strategy aimed at boosting international support. As an academic working on China explained, this ‘creates a pool of supportive countries that buy into the Chinese narrative and practices of providing security, and that turns into political support and that can be used as capacity in debates within the multilateral fora.’<sup>20</sup>

It is also specifically geared towards achieving specific national goals, mainly the removal of diplomatic recognition for Taiwan. This is true in the Pacific as elsewhere. In Central America and the Caribbean, for example, this helped drive early law enforcement assistance. As a former US official explained,

'[It] started with them giving away police cars, in competition with Taiwan, who had done that for years and years. And so, China would come in and go one more. It was hard and fast on things people could see.'<sup>21</sup> Such dynamics are still likely the case, particularly in the areas of the Pacific where Taiwan is officially recognized as a sovereign state.<sup>22</sup>

A second geopolitical benefit for the PRC relates to streamlining the missions for the People's Liberation Army (PLA). In the 2000s and early 2010s, the PRC seemed to view the PLA as a tool for protecting and evacuating Chinese workers facing danger abroad. However, as President Xi has increasingly reoriented the PLA towards preparing for potential conflict near China's borders, such distant missions arguably posed a distraction.<sup>23</sup>

Instead, the PRC has used law enforcement assistance as a tool to strengthen the ability of partner states to effectively protect and evacuate Chinese workers. Several instances over the past decade, for example in Ethiopia in 2020, suggest this approach has been effective. 'I see the use of police assistance as providing a lot of the protection elements,' explained one China expert, 'but without a lot of the problems.'<sup>24</sup>

A third geopolitical theme involves security in China's neighbouring regions. This area contains large pockets of instability, such as in northern Myanmar and Afghanistan, where weak states coexist with serious organized crime and terrorism threats. There have been repeated attacks on Chinese workers in some areas, such as Pakistan, and victimization of Chinese nationals in others, such as through human trafficking to scam centres in Myanmar or attacks on Chinese sailors along the Mekong River.<sup>25</sup>

Although this issue is less pronounced in the Pacific itself, Beijing sees unrest and instability in the neighbouring regions as a potential risk to domestic stability, economic development in border regions, and party control.<sup>26</sup>

Beginning in 2013, President Xi has directed increasing PRC diplomatic, economic and law enforcement focus in these areas, termed 'periphery diplomacy'.<sup>27</sup> This has led to China increasingly supporting or training law enforcement actors and institutions in the neighbouring region more directly.<sup>28</sup> This includes China's extraterritorial operations – especially along the Mekong, bilateral assistance and support, as well as emphasis on multilateral entities such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Lancang-Mekong River Integrated Law Enforcement and Security Cooperation Centre.<sup>29</sup>

The second theme concerns how foreign law enforcement assistance plays into the PRC's domestic strategies, particularly demonstrating protection and control over Chinese nationals abroad. This issue is of greater relevance in China's engagement in the Pacific.

Protecting PRC workers abroad is now a domestic driver of foreign law enforcement assistance. Over the last two decades, large numbers of Chinese nationals have moved abroad, often in conjunction with developing PRC business interests (including Belt and Road Initiative- (BRI) linked projects). These workers, together with the broader diaspora, are increasingly seen by the PRC as strategic assets that can gather information and exert influence.<sup>30</sup> Given their value, they were to receive support via facilitators within Chinese embassies and elsewhere.<sup>31</sup>

However, they have faced a number of hazards and recurrent risks from political unrest.<sup>32</sup> This in turn has led to domestic pressure on the Chinese government to protect the workers. 'The issue is, now they have got all these people out in the world and the PRC can't protect them or control them like they are in China,' explained one academic expert on China.<sup>33</sup> This issue has only become more complex

as significant numbers of Chinese nationals become involved in the cyber scam centres in the border regions of the South East Asia, blurring the boundaries of criminality and victimhood. To give a sense of scale, in 2025 China's Ministry of Public Security (MPS) repatriated over 7 600 Chinese nationals from Myawaddy (Myanmar) alone. They had been engaged in (or likely coerced into)<sup>34</sup> telecom and online fraud targeting Chinese nationals.<sup>35</sup>

Partly in response to this, China has increasingly focused on protecting the workers in these areas.<sup>36</sup> Demonstrating protection of workers abroad helps to minimise domestic concern around the issue and underscores the Communist Party's legitimacy as protector of citizens. One of the main avenues to do this, since the mid-2010s, has been through policing assistance.

Another domestic factor driving Chinese assistance abroad is concern around political challenges within the Chinese diaspora. One diaspora expert noted that China sees the diaspora communities as a potential source of opposition, and therefore wants to have full control over it – both through incentives and coercion.<sup>37</sup> This in turn has driven the PRC's efforts to develop relations with states hosting large diasporas, and at times leveraging formal law enforcement coordination mechanisms – such as extradition treaties – to achieve the return of diaspora individuals accused of various crimes.

There is, however, also a broader global aspect of diaspora management. An interviewee in Latin America noted that over the last decade or more, the PRC has come to view overseas Chinese citizens as potential assets; that is, if it can utilize them, an observation also true of the Pacific.<sup>38</sup> This shift, in turn, has altered Chinese party-state behaviour towards overseas Chinese communities, which has led some subnational security forces within China to establish representative offices abroad – normally termed 'Chinese Community and Police Cooperation Centres' (known also by various other names, all typically within a network of 'Overseas Chinese Service Centres').

In addition to administrative tasks, such as providing services for members of the Chinese diaspora and tourists, these centres were in some cases linked to the PRC's efforts to build influence overseas. In the case of Spain, for example, they were 'actively working with Chinese police to engage in covert and illegal policing operations'.<sup>39</sup>

Overall, China's domestic policing approach differs substantially from those promoted by the traditional police cooperation partners across the Pacific. Rather than a rule of law-based citizen security, the PRC system focused more on internal security and regime protection.

The focus on 'stability maintenance' (*weiwen*, “维稳”) is so pervasive, that more 'everyday' policing in the community (or 'low policing', see textbox below) has arguably become ineffective.<sup>40</sup> This prioritisation manifests itself in various ways domestically, for example, in police training where a substantial amount of instruction is focused on ideology, rather than on full spectrum patrolling or investigation skills.<sup>41</sup>

This has implications for law enforcement assistance, with interviewees suggesting that where Chinese international policing cooperation engages diaspora groups and Chinese citizens abroad, it is not simply a reflection of targeted extraterritorial approaches, but an extension of China's domestic measures and a mirror of internal norms.

These differences help explain why Chinese policing cooperation abroad can sometimes reflect domestic security priorities. The distinction between 'high policing' and 'low policing' provides a useful framework for understanding this dynamic.

## ‘High Policing’ and ‘Low Policing’

In 1983, Canadian criminologist Jean-Paul Brodeur introduced the terms ‘high policing’ and ‘low policing’ into English language criminological research.<sup>42</sup> Exploring international police cooperation and training in the transnational context requires a clear and suitable conceptual framework. The research and interviews conducted for this project suggest that Brodeur’s terms may be useful in this context. In general terms, ‘high policing’ refers to the use of police institutions to maintain political order and regime security. ‘Low policing’ in turn refers to policing to maintain public order of more conventional ‘everyday’ criminality experienced by the wider population.

Although there is a debate to be had around the terms themselves and the intricacies of their meaning (for example in Brodeur’s later reconsideration of the role of private security agencies, or in the relationship between high policing and its utilization of criminals to achieve objectives),<sup>43</sup> the terms are employed here as a broad analytical framework. Where used explicitly, these terms are employed in a broad sense as defined above. This distinction helps explain how elements of China’s domestic policing model may shape its approach to law enforcement cooperation abroad. ■

## Focus areas for law enforcement sector assistance

Like other countries cooperating in this sector in the Pacific, China deploys foreign law enforcement assistance within defined issue-sets. The prioritization of issues, however, has shifted somewhat over the last few years, with diaspora-related policing emerging as an increasingly important area.<sup>44</sup>

### Counterterrorism

One of the longest-standing global issue sets for China is counterterrorism. In the immediate wake of the September 11 attacks in the US, the PRC began to review its own vulnerabilities on the issue.<sup>45</sup> This review, in turn, led the government to focus more closely on terrorist threats originating from abroad, particularly from countries in the neighbouring regions, including both Central Asia and South East Asia.<sup>46</sup> This intensified during the BRI, with concerns about foreign terrorist attacks on Chinese workers viewed not just as a geopolitical challenge, but also a source of potential domestic unrest.

As a result, the PRC increased bilateral assistance to strengthen counterterrorism capacity amongst partner states and negotiated extradition and information sharing agreements.<sup>47</sup> This has included expanding training courses for foreign officials, both on technical counterterrorism skills and on China’s counterterrorism laws.<sup>48</sup> There are reports of some funding for border guards in states along the country’s periphery, again aimed at the terrorism challenge.<sup>49</sup> The PRC also began engaging more actively in the matter with components of multilateral organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).<sup>50</sup>

Chinese activity also has domestic legal grounds for direct and specific activities overseas. Article 71 of the 2015 PRC counterterrorism law allows personnel from the People’s Liberation Army and the People’s Armed Police (PAP) to engage in overseas operations in cooperation with other states involved.<sup>51</sup>

This global counterterrorism approach brings the PRC closer to some others operating in the sector, such as the US (until recently), however, there remain significant differences. For China, the primary focus is capacity building for counterterrorism forces. In so doing, this underscores a belief that through training and equipment alone, the challenge can be addressed. The US, in contrast, has gradually adopted a more nuanced approach which entails both law enforcement assistance for capacity building and an explicit aim of addressing grievances fuelling terrorism. This is an attempt to shift norms within law enforcement and government forces that risk fuelling extremist recruitment in fragile states.

### **Stability to protect workers**

A further focus of PRC foreign law enforcement assistance is to strengthen partner capacity in areas that host large numbers of Chinese nationals, or receive heavy investment from PRC-based companies.<sup>52</sup> Beijing has repeatedly called for local protection of workers and investments.<sup>53</sup> To reduce the risk of instability or crime targeting overseas workers, China has provided equipment and to a lesser degree training to key local security forces. 'China provides equipment and these things are really cheap, for example, weapons or vehicles or riot gear – it is a very small investment for a very great return', one interviewee noted. 'So, I think on the Chinese side, the thinking at this point is why not boost the capabilities of local authorities to maintain stability.'<sup>54</sup>

Such stabilization efforts, however, differ in orientation from the Pacific's more traditional law enforcement partners. As with counterterrorism, China approaches the issue of stability and worker protection in fragile states as a capacity matter. It is assumed that if provided with sufficient capacity, law enforcement actors will be able to mitigate emerging threats. There is no indication that the PRC has sought to promote normative shifts amongst security forces, such as efforts to counter corruption or address human rights abuses. This may explain why Chinese assistance is readily accepted by security forces and the elite, whose incentive to change advantageous status quos is often limited.<sup>55</sup> This clashes with various traditional partner approaches which, though not always effectively, have tended more towards attitudinal and normative shifts over the last 30 years.

### **Countering subversives and corruption abroad**

Finally, an increasingly important issue set for the PRC involves efforts to police and control individuals perceived as a domestic threat to the CCP's authority within China. Three prominent examples include Uyghur nationalists, members of the Falun Gong movement and former state officials accused of corruption.<sup>56</sup> Efforts to counter these perceived threats (or 'subversives') abroad pre-date President Xi. However, activity has increased significantly during his tenure, including a major anticorruption campaign (Operation Foxhunt) launched in 2014.<sup>57</sup>

In practice, PRC efforts to counter subversives and individuals accused of corruption abroad hinge on several different elements. First, the development of extradition treaties and other formal police cooperation agreements. These agreements allow foreign states to arrest and extradite individuals to China. They function as a tool for intimidation, continuously threatening potential subversives with arrest.

A recent high-profile extradition case involved the arrest of billionaire Chen Zhi in Cambodia in early 2026 and his extradition to China alongside two other Chinese nationals.<sup>58</sup> Chen, whose network had been sanctioned by the United States and the United Kingdom in 2025,<sup>59</sup> is accused of orchestrating a large crypto currency scam in which trafficking victims were forced to defraud people globally from compounds in South East Asia.

It is worth noting, however, that in some cases, Chinese law enforcement personnel have allegedly transferred targeted individuals back to China without the formal involvement of local law enforcement authorities.<sup>60</sup>

Second, the creation of police posts abroad is, in part, assessed by interviewees as a tool for monitoring and managing potential subversives. The individuals staffing these offices do not have any real authority. However, coupled with other tools of pressure, they can have a potent chilling effect on the diaspora.

These efforts illustrate how China's policing engagement abroad serves several domestic and strategic objectives. Understanding how this engagement works in practice requires examining the operational approaches through which Chinese law enforcement assistance is delivered.

## **Operational approaches**

PRC law enforcement assistance abroad is opaque, with very little clear information on funding levels, the ministries involved or whether and how coordination occurs between them.

The MPS plays a significant role, while a second force – the PAP – plays a lesser role. The MPS and PAP (which reports to the CCP's Central Military Commission) are mandated to promote and implement China's global vision overseas. They prioritize tackling nontraditional security threats affecting Chinese interests and nationals while helping develop strategic relationships with partner countries.

Within the context of increasing international engagement and lacking clear delineation between different types of security, the role of the MPS has grown.

Stability maintenance, the MPS's domestic priority, is also central to relationships the PRC builds overseas and the security assistance and policing cooperation programmes it delivers to partners at its regional periphery and increasingly further afield. It is particularly throughout the so-called Global South that China seeks to export an alternative model of security assistance which, in Beijing's view, is better suited than the West's approach to address the nonconventional threats local partners face, either individually or at the subregional level.<sup>61</sup>

## **Types of bilateral operational activity and implementers**

At the bilateral level, the MPS engages in a multitude of security assistance and policing activities that can be divided in four main categories, identified by the Centre for American Progress.<sup>62</sup>

First are policing agreements. These come in different forms depending on the partner country and its needs. For example, China secured an agreement with Switzerland to support local authorities when interviewing Chinese people who have overstayed their visa (although some have argued this could be a way for the MPS to monitor individuals of interest). Other agreements, particularly with Asian countries, are often driven by partners' interests in developing capabilities to manage riots and dissenting voices.

Following that is capacity building. Providing training provision, both in partner countries and in China, is a cornerstone of Chinese foreign assistance, with courses offered on matter ranging from military doctrine to journalism and Chinese language.<sup>63</sup> From a policing perspective, the MPS delivers training on stability maintenance, disaster response, police-media relations, cyber, AI, forensics and, increasingly under President Xi, legal matters, among many others.<sup>64</sup>

Next is the provision of material assistance, ranging from uniforms and constructing facilities to more controversial DNA laboratories. As pointed out by Jordan Link, the latter are reminiscent of the PRC's domestic DNA monitoring programmes used to track ethnic minorities such as the Uyghur. There is, therefore, the risk that, were recipient countries ever to go down undemocratic paths, they might be tempted to employ such capabilities for similarly illiberal purposes.<sup>65</sup>

The final matter concerns joint security patrols and liaison officers. The most well-known occur along the Mekong River under the aegis of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism mentioned above. However, the MPS has a track record of conducting extraterritorial joint patrols with partner countries where there is a high concentration of Chinese expats and tourists, including sites beyond traditional overseas police engagement.<sup>66</sup>

As well as involvement in joint patrols with Myanmar, Laos and Thailand, the MPS has dispatched liaison officers to foreign countries as part of its role in 'protecting' Chinese nationals overseas. Their responsibilities 'have gradually expanded to cover other nontraditional threats such as terrorism, but also close bilateral cooperation with local law-enforcement agencies to investigate crimes against Chinese nationals, including those perpetuated by Chinese criminal gangs'.<sup>67</sup>

## Ministry of Public Security's use of the Lianyungang Forum

The MPS is connected to the Lianyungang Forum, originally founded in 2015 to coordinate BRI security and intended as 'an international institution for police cooperation'.<sup>68</sup> It has since expanded its remit, e.g. it has been used to coordinate foreign arrests. The forum (and the Global Public Security Cooperation Forum, as it is now known) has featured representatives from a significant number of countries (both liberal democracies and authoritarian states), as well as organizations such as Interpol and the SCO.<sup>69</sup>

As the sector has matured, further evidence of convergence and coordination has emerged, illustrated by developments at the Lianyungang Forum. The forum includes, for example, representatives from another security institution created by China in the 2010s: the Lancang-Mekong River Integrated Law Enforcement and Security Cooperation Centre. In addition to coordination between institutions, the Lianyungang Forum demonstrates a degree of cross-sector synchronization. As a side event of the forum, the Police Equipment and Public Security Products Expo represents an MPS-sponsored event aimed at boosting the domestic security industry.<sup>70</sup> Reflecting convergence between party-state security institutions and Chinese industry, expo exhibitors have included Huawei, ZTE, Dahua, and Hikvision.<sup>71</sup>

Notably, the Forum has featured Pacific representatives including, for instance, a keynote speech delivered by

Solomon Islands' Minister of Police, National Security and Correctional Services on cooperative security in 2024.<sup>72</sup>

Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province, also hosted the Fourth Ministerial Dialogue on Police Capacity Building and Cooperation between China and the Pacific Island countries in September 2025. Co-chaired by Chinese State Councillor and Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong and Tonga's Minister for Police Paula Piukala, the dialogue was also attended by delegations from Fiji, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Samoa, Nauru and Papua New Guinea.<sup>73</sup> ■



Solomon Islands Minister of Police National Security and Correctional Services Hon. Jimson Tanangada at the 2024 Conference of Global Public Security Cooperation Forum (Lianyungang forum). Photo: Ministry of Police National Security and Correctional Services

## Global patterns of engagement, criticism and impact

The MPS's increasing presence overseas has arguably been the most discussed development among observers outside of China. US commentary, for example, noted that MPS activities overseas in this area 'threaten U.S. national security interests by influencing security sector governance to undermine respect for the rule of law and human rights'.<sup>74</sup>

While the principle of common security, the emphasis on finding peaceful resolutions to conflicts and the commitment to the UN Charter espoused under the GSI are mostly noncontentious, China's intent to promote its model of international relations and security cooperation, and its version of human rights,<sup>75</sup> are indeed more problematic.

At the operational level, police training delivered by China to partner countries frequently highlights significant differences between policing models. For instance, China's approach to riots and crowd control is typically at odds with human rights-centric approaches traditionally associated with democratic countries.<sup>76</sup> More broadly, there is a marked dichotomy between 'human rights with Chinese characteristics' as defined by the state under President Xi, and human rights as more commonly understood as inalienable rights of all individuals.<sup>77</sup> This difference manifests itself in several ways, including in attitudes towards and definitions of community policing – a critical feature of the Pacific policing landscape. In this regard, elements of China's training and capacity-building initiatives are grounded in paramilitary approaches – which tend to distance the police from communities – and may clash with some recipient countries' preference for community engagement and partnership-building.<sup>78</sup> However, the lack of resources to sustain this kind of approach, coupled with China's offer of training, risks pushing recipient countries towards more repressive policing practices. Interestingly, recent experience in Solomon Islands' shows that the PRC is venturing into the community policing space, filling gaps that, for one reason or another, are not prioritized by other donors (see section below).

At the strategic level, China's deepening cooperation and influence in recipient countries have raised global concerns that it could put a wedge between traditional partners and those same countries, even when long standing relationships exist. In this framing, receiving PRC assistance is thought to carry expectations that countries will adopt favourable positions and policies towards China, which include both siding with Beijing in the international arena and creating a welcoming environment for Chinese investors and businesses (the latter notwithstanding the illicit practices adopted by some Chinese businesses, e.g. in the extractive industries, on which a blind eye is often turned).<sup>79</sup> These expectations are made known at all levels, including in the messaging disseminated during police training.<sup>80</sup> However, there is little indication that acceptance of support from one partner has led any state to forego support from another.

The juxtaposition between PRC and Western assistance also highlights differences in the ways programmes are conceived and implemented. In many instances, China appears to be a more agile player than traditional partners. In other words, Chinese assistance comes with fewer conditions and may therefore be more attractive to recipients.

A frequently voiced concern is that, by deepening its presence in policing, the MPS improves its positioning for intelligence collection, including gathering information about the state of the relationship (and security arrangements) between the recipient country and other security assistance providers.<sup>81</sup>

Another concern, taken from global examples that may be relevant to the Pacific, stems from the risks to national sovereignty when critical networks of recipient countries are linked to the Chinese system.

Similar vulnerabilities may arise when developing smart cities (e.g. in Guyana). A further risk identified particularly in Latin America is that by gaining access to local systems and databases, the MPS is able to identify corrupt individuals and leverage the information for the purpose of blackmailing them.<sup>82</sup> Sources consulted in March 2026 for this study reported that the authorities of an Asian country, after completing training in China, promptly destroyed the accompanying software they had been gifted by their hosts.

Notwithstanding problematic aspects of Chinese security and policing assistance, these efforts also bring some benefits to the recipient countries. Therefore, it would be unwise to cast them in an entirely negative light. Assistance and cooperation are largely provided to emerging and developing countries facing fiscal constraints. China helps fill those financial and capacity gaps.<sup>83</sup> PRC support can help upskill officers to improve operational performance at no financial cost to the local organisations. It can also provide local officers insights into different operational strategies.<sup>84</sup>

China also donates equipment, vehicles, electronic systems, biometric facilities and helps build infrastructure. The presence of Chinese police officers in partner countries can also help, to an extent, investigate crimes committed by Chinese nationals, and some intelligence cooperation exists to address organized crime.<sup>85</sup> The next section examines the broad spectrum of Chinese engagement in the South Pacific, identifying both benefits and risks.



# CHINA'S LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

**T**he 21st century has seen an intensification of Chinese activity in the Pacific Islands, encompassing diplomatic, economic as well as security efforts. This region of the world is one of the latest hotspots for geopolitical competition between Western countries and China, and these efforts are both causes and symptoms of unfolding rivalries. Beijing's perceived need to contrast US maritime encirclement through 'island chains' in the North Pacific (including, for instance, in Micronesia and US territories such as Guam) is arguably driving China to seek and establish various security arrangements with South Pacific countries.<sup>86</sup> Such arrangements also include law enforcement assistance and cooperation.

As shown in the previous section, the PRC's security and policing activities should be seen as part of Beijing's wider political engagement with the Pacific Islands. These are key tools in furthering its strategic agenda, including monitoring Chinese nationals as part of that continuum between domestic and external security highlighted in the preceding section. In this region, policing may be considered an even bigger tool of influence given that most countries, with the exception of Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Tonga, do not have militaries that could be leveraged for this purpose.

It is important to stress that significant differences exist among Pacific Island countries, even within subregional groups such as Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia. Of particular importance to this report are differences related to their histories of foreign engagement, e.g. through a colonial past or other, existing security and law enforcement capacity, and political alignment. Traditionally, cooperation partners have taken the lead in supporting particular subregions, namely Australia in Melanesia, New Zealand in Polynesia, and the US in Micronesia, especially in the Freely Associated States (the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau) where the US has responsibility over security and defence matters. This 'division of labour' does not preclude these or other cooperation partners from engaging with *all* Pacific countries.

A 2024 survey of security, defence and policing agreements in the ten largest Pacific countries shows that over 50% of existing agreements were signed with Australia, followed in decreasing order by New

Zealand, the US and China.<sup>87</sup> Notably, policing is at the centre of more than half of those agreements.<sup>88</sup> Canberra's prominence in this space is best exemplified by the Pacific Policing Initiative, a Pacific-led Australian Federal Police-supported initiative aimed at boosting law enforcement capacity across the region which was launched in 2024,<sup>89</sup> and a number of high profile bilateral agreements that have a security component. These include the Australia–Tuvalu Falepili Union Treaty that came into force in 2024,<sup>90</sup> and the landmark Mutual Defence Treaty (also known as the Pukpuk Treaty) signed in 2025 and that elevated the relationship with Papua New Guinea to an Alliance (the first for Australia in 70 years).<sup>91</sup>

## Law enforcement engagement across the region

Beyond law enforcement engagement, China has largely been successful in presenting itself as a dynamic partner for Pacific islanders, one that is able to deliver all forms of support and infrastructure more rapidly and that is less constrained by bureaucracy (and oversight and transparency requirements) compared to Western counterparts. These features have made the PRC an attractive option for many, albeit not all, Pacific Islands and, as a result, have increased concerns among traditional partners over Beijing's expanding regional influence not only in the policing sphere but also from a strategic perspective.

These concerns were heightened in May 2022, when China's foreign minister Wang Yi met with Pacific foreign ministers to discuss 'a sweeping regional economic and security deal'.<sup>92</sup> The deal reportedly included a proposal that China would

train regional police forces as well as hold a first China-Pacific Islands Countries ministerial dialogue on law enforcement capacity and police cooperation – the first of its kind. Cybersecurity and rules for data governance are also mentioned, thus going well beyond an interpretation of Chinese interests as solely concerned with establishing a basing facility.<sup>93</sup>

Despite a concerted diplomatic effort by China, consensus could not ultimately be reached and so the draft communique was temporarily shelved, with Wang Yi telling his counterparts, 'Don't be too anxious and don't be too nervous, because the common development and prosperity of China and all the other developing countries would only mean great harmony, greater justice and greater progress of the whole world'.<sup>94</sup> Coming only a month after Solomon Islands had signed a security pact with Beijing that was greeted with concern in Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the US, the proposed deal seemed to confirm a more forthright Chinese engagement in the region, in the security realm and beyond.<sup>95</sup> This episode speaks to some of the reasons the Pacific Islands region represents a suitable location to interrogate the topic of China's growing international police cooperation, as the region is increasingly a crucible of geopolitical tension.

The PRC's motivations and approach in the region reflect a combination of factors and drivers. As already mentioned, there are strategic objectives concerning security, political influence (in competition with the West) and economic advancement (e.g. acquiring natural resources) that underpin China's overarching approach to the region. These objectives are achieved by deepening relations with Pacific Island countries. Security and law enforcement assistance are only *one* facet among many, such as commercial deals, the building of roads, and scholarships for language training and university degrees. They serve a further purpose, however. As examples of extrajudicial arrests and deportations illustrate, PRC policing presence allows for monitoring of Chinese nationals abroad (it is

no surprise that monitoring devices are often embedded in PRC-donated equipment), as well as their protection. The need for the latter, however, appears to have been exaggerated in some cases. As will be illustrated, China has capitalized on unrest or political tensions occurring in the likes of Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea or Vanuatu to offer on-the-ground assistance. This includes for the stated purpose of protecting Chinese nationals. These engagements are helpful in paving the way towards a more prolonged PRC policing presence.

## **An array of relationships**

China maintains a range of engagements with South Pacific countries, including law enforcement and policing assistance.<sup>96</sup> These engagements range from high-profile security and cooperation agreements – such as those with Fiji and Solomon Island which will be discussed in the next section – to more incremental forms of support, including capacity building and infrastructure development.

### **Cook Islands**

The experience of the Cook Islands illustrates this latter category and serves as a reminder that geopolitical competition, in this case between the PRC and New Zealand, can extend even to smaller Pacific states.

The Cook Islands is a self-governing territory in free association with New Zealand. Speculation over China-Cook Islands security ties intensified after a senior officer attended the Second Ministerial Dialogue on Police Capacity Building and Cooperation between China and Pacific Island Countries in Beijing in 2023.<sup>97</sup> No security agreement appears to be imminent, but this does not mean an absence of substantive support.

As early as 2004, the PRC approved a \$2.8 million grant to build the Cook Islands Police Headquarters, a project implemented by China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation and completed in 2007.<sup>98</sup> This was followed a decade later by another grant to repair this and other government buildings,<sup>99</sup> and later by the 2025 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.<sup>100</sup> The latter, alongside other bilateral agreements between the two countries, made waves in the region. Although it does not include any security commitments, it has affected relations between the Cook Islands and New Zealand.<sup>101</sup>

### **Samoa**

As part of BRI projects in the region,<sup>102</sup> the PRC has also funded the construction of Samoa's new Police Academy, inaugurated in 2024, nine years after Apia had accepted Beijing's offer.<sup>103</sup> The academy represents the most visible manifestation of Chinese security assistance in Samoa. However, it has attracted some criticism regarding the suitability of the facilities and quality of the infrastructure – cracks apparently started to show by the time the first cohort graduated in 2025.<sup>104</sup> The academy is expected to collaborate closely with the China-Pacific Island Countries Police Training Centre in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, also inaugurated in 2024. Beyond this major project, assistance includes Mandarin language training for officers in Samoa,<sup>105</sup> forensic training,<sup>106</sup> musical instruments for Samoa's police band, and a seminar on civil peacekeeping. Samoa, like many of its neighbours, has been simultaneously cultivating policing engagements with other partners, namely, Australia, New Zealand and India.<sup>107</sup> This is a balancing act well known and often practiced by police leaders around the region, including in Vanuatu.

## Why Guangdong and Fujian feature prominently in China-Pacific policing cooperation

Engagement between China and Pacific Island countries frequently involves actors from the southern coastal provinces of Guangdong and Fujian. This pattern reflects two structural factors: historical migration linkages and China's use of subnational actors in external engagement.

A significant share of Chinese migration to the Pacific since the 19th century originated from Guangdong and Fujian. These movements established durable commercial, linguistic



A bus donated to the Fiji Rugby Union by the Chinese city of Guangzhou in Guangdong Province, Suva, Fiji, 26 August 2025.

*Photo supplied*

and kinship networks across parts of the Pacific, especially in Melanesia and Polynesia. Such diaspora linkages continue to shape business communities and social connections in several Pacific Island countries.<sup>108</sup>

At the same time, China's foreign engagement model increasingly incorporates provincial and municipal actors in support of national strategy — a practice sometimes described as 'Chinese paradiplomacy'.<sup>109</sup> Through trade promotion, sister-city relationships and sectoral exchanges, subnational governments can leverage local expertise and overseas networks while aligning with central priorities.

In the policing domain, cooperation initiatives may therefore draw on provinces with longstanding overseas connections and outward-facing administrative experience. This does not imply decentralized foreign policymaking. Rather, it reflects a layered governance approach in which subnational actors contribute to centrally defined objectives, particularly where diaspora, economic and transnational security intersect. ■

### Vanuatu

Vanuatu has a long-standing commitment to its nonalignment and neutrality, and a history of engagement with multiple partners including Australia, the US, France, New Zealand, Japan and China. In 2025, amendments to the National Security Act required foreign advisers working in the national security sector to be based at neutral venues or at their respective embassies. According to Ni-Vanuatu lawmakers, these measures were necessary to preserve the country's sovereignty and growing geopolitical competition and foreign influence.<sup>110</sup> As of early 2026, the removal of advisers — including the AFP officers who are part of the Vanuatu Australia Policing and Justice Programme (VAPJP) or the Chinese Police Liaison Team (CPLT) — is yet to occur. However, foreign law enforcement officials have expressed concern regarding the impact that such removals might have on their work at a time when multiple partners are vying for greater influence.



China donated equipment to the Vanuatu Police Force in December 2025. *Photo: Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Vanuatu*

Vanuatu's experience also offers wider lessons. The government in Port Vila signed an agreement with the PRC as early as 2004 to provide equipment and training to the Vanuatu Police Force in China with a focus on 'antiterrorism warfare and bodyguard and self-defence skills'.<sup>111</sup> The PLA has also provided vehicles, and further assistance over the years has included the donation of riot gear, uniforms and other equipment. In a diplomatically sensitive development, it emerged in 2018 that China had asked for permission to establish a military base in Vanuatu, something that the then prime minister reassured Australia and others would not happen.<sup>112</sup> Some analysts have argued that the experience in Vanuatu has served as a cautionary lesson for the PRC, suggesting that a more gradual approach – beginning with deeper relations with partner countries – would more likely yield the desired outcome of securing an agreement to build a Chinese base on a Pacific island. This may potentially be part of Beijing's calculations vis-à-vis the intensification of relations with Solomon Islands which will be discussed later.<sup>113</sup> It should be noted, however, that Beijing has denied having such intentions, and there is no consensus among analysts on whether China seeks to establish military bases in the Pacific islands.

In more recent years, and in keeping with the approach adopted elsewhere, PRC policing engagement has focused on public order. In the midst of a political crisis in 2023, China dispatched police experts, uniforms and handcuffs to 'enhance the ability of the Vanuatu police to maintain social order'.<sup>114</sup> China has also continued to provide training,<sup>115</sup> equipment and motorcycles,<sup>116</sup> and negotiations were underway in 2025 to sign a Memorandum of Understanding on policing cooperation.<sup>117</sup> These negotiations, alongside a multimillion dollar unconditional grant, may have contributed to delaying the signature of the long-awaited Nakamal Agreement between Vanuatu and Australia on the basis that the treaty with Canberra would undermine economic relationships with China.<sup>118</sup>

Field observations and interviews for this report suggest that, in the post- pandemic period, the CPLT has grown in assertiveness. Traditionally, the CPLT in Vanuatu focused on three areas: forensics, the use of force and traffic operations depending on the expertise of individual CPLT officers (rather than prioritizing the Vanuatu Police Force's needs, some interviewees have argued).<sup>119</sup> The team has grown from four officers in 2024 to six in 2025, with eight additional officers newly deployed in January 2026 (in addition to a police liaison officer).<sup>120</sup> Over the same period, Vanuatu hosted group visits of officers from China. This increased assertiveness is also reflected in the brazen behaviour of CPLT officers who overtly take pictures of law enforcement advisers from other countries, including when off duty and in the company of their families. Rather than conventional profiling or intelligence gathering, these actions are perceived as attempts at intimidation by those who are photographed.<sup>121</sup>

## Chinese Police Liaison Teams

As of March 2026, China's Ministry of Public Security has two Chinese Police Liaison Teams (CPLTs) deployed to the South Pacific, namely in Solomon Islands, starting in 2022, and Vanuatu since 2023. An additional CPLT has been stationed in Kiribati since 2024.

CPLTs vary in size and work closely with host nation's police forces providing advisory functions, law enforcement cooperation, community outreach, training and equipment support. ■



Chinese officers training the Vanuatu Police Force, 4 December 2025. Photo: Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Vanuatu

## **Papua New Guinea**

Papua New Guinea is the most populous country in the region and has the highest levels of violence. It is also the largest recipient of Australian aid. The country also features a large Chinese diaspora pre-dating independence and enjoys a close relationship with the PRC in other areas, such as extractive industries and a successful scholarship programme to study in China. Heavy investment from Western allies in the relationship may partly explain why, over the years, Papua New Guinea has received only modest Chinese law enforcement assistance, e.g. police vehicles ahead of hosting of the 2018 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meetings in Port Moresby.<sup>122</sup> China has attempted to alter the status quo.

In September 2023, Beijing offered Papua New Guinea a security deal to aid the police with 'training, equipment, and surveillance technology', shortly after the country had signed a A\$200 million security deal with Australia to strengthen policing.<sup>123</sup> Violent protests that broke out in Papua New Guinea in early 2024 seemed to invigorate talks with Beijing over a possible agreement.<sup>124</sup> Even in the absence of a formal agreement, however, a degree of cooperation exists. In a media interview the same year, Papua New Guinea's deputy police commissioner disclosed that he regularly sought advice from the Chinese Embassy on issues such as money laundering, illegal migration and prostitution, and welcomed future training programmes.<sup>125</sup> The signing of the Pukpuk Treaty with Australia in 2025 appears to have reduced the political space for a parallel formal agreement with China. Hence, chances of a Papua New Guinea-PRC policing or security deal in the short and probably medium term are limited. Aware of this changed environment, Beijing has publicly urged Port Moresby not to compromise its independence by entering in an agreement with Australia that would preclude cooperation with other partners.<sup>126</sup>

## **Tonga**

Tonga is another country very familiar with the balancing act of managing relationships with multiple policing partners, where the law enforcement cooperation and assistance space has become particularly 'congested'. The Polynesian kingdom, in fact, receives support from policing partners as diverse as Australia and the United Arab Emirates, to mention just two.

Tonga has a large Chinese diaspora (whose businesses were among the targets of the 2006 Nuku'alofa riots)<sup>127</sup> and substantial financial debt with the PRC, but no Chinese Police Liaison Team as of early 2026. The degree of acceptance of China's offers of law enforcement support have varied over time.<sup>128</sup> Among other factors, changes in the PRC's approach in Tonga and shifts in the local police leadership have likely influenced the ebbs and flows of the relationship. At the time of writing, pragmatism on both sides seems to drive the interaction between the Chinese Embassy and the Tongan Police. Developments in recent years illustrate those changes.

In earlier years, Nuku'alofa has received police motorcycles – for example, to support the hosting of 38th Pacific Islands Forum meeting in 2007<sup>129</sup> – as well as forensic equipment. In 2024, the Kingdom appeared more cautious in considering China's offer of support ahead of the Pacific Islands Forum meeting to be held in the capital.<sup>130</sup> The Tongan military as well as other Forum members were deemed best placed to support the Tongan police around this high-profile event. The then police commissioner also pointed out that cultural and language barriers made training from nationals such as New Zealand and Australia more appropriate.<sup>131</sup> There is also a mismatch between policing models. To this day, an approach that includes the collection of biometric data and surveillance, which is normally associated with the MPS, is seen as at odds with Tongan, and indeed Pacific, policing. Moreover, reports over the poor quality of some Chinese-built infrastructure elsewhere – for example, in Samoa's case mentioned earlier, or the lack of maintenance for donated vehicles – make those forms of assistance less appealing.<sup>132</sup>

In the spirit of pragmatism, however, there are ad hoc areas where China's support is not only welcomed but is invited. China is the world's main producer of precursor chemicals used in the manufacturing of methamphetamines whose rising trafficking and use are Pacific concerns. As such, the MPS has substantial experience in this area, and it is therefore understandable for Tongan authorities to have requested training and equipment to specifically address the challenge of synthetic drugs and their precursors.<sup>133</sup> There is a recent precedent for drug enforcement support in Solomon Islands where the CPLT has delivered drug testing kits and related training to the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF).<sup>134</sup> The requested training is to take place in China, rather than in Tonga, which could be perceived as part of the perennial balancing of relationships with other partners such as Australia, New Zealand, the US and the UK. The Fujian Police College, whose representatives visited Tonga in January 2026, also understand these sensitivities. Pragmatism is also guiding China's approach, which shifted from being rather 'aggressive' at the beginning of this decade to a softer, more measured approach that recognizes the range and diversity of Tonga's diplomatic relationships. In doing so, it is gaining respect by avoiding to push local counterparts to choose between 'us and them'.<sup>135</sup>

## Chinese police activity abroad and links to criminality

Analysis of Chinese party-state police training and related activity abroad is typically concerned with geopolitical assets, but research also reveals apparent linkages to criminality itself. Such connections could represent a significant additional risk to other countries.

China-born businessman based in Fiji, Zhao Fugang, has come under intense scrutiny due to reported links to criminality, the Chinese party-state, and high-level Fijian officials.<sup>136</sup> Research for this report suggests his involvement in 'a symposium on police-community security exchange' in Suva, jointly organized by 'the Chinese Embassy in Fiji, the Fiji Police Service, and the overseas Chinese community' in 2021.<sup>137</sup>



The 2021 Fiji police and Chinese security exchange event, in which Zhao Fugang (far right) played in a prominent role. *Photo: Baidu*

Attendees learnt about the close cooperation between the Chinese embassy and the Fijian police, as well as 'the safety and legitimate rights and interests of Chinese citizens and institutions in Fiji'. The Fijian Police Force also received a donation of FJ\$15,000 from the Chinese embassy. Speaking at the event in his capacity as director of the Fiji Chinese Assistance Centre, Zhao 'called on overseas Chinese in Fiji to enhance their safety awareness while expanding their businesses, actively integrate into the local community, and contribute to the development of friendly relations between China and Fiji'.<sup>138</sup>

Analysis of China-Papua New Guinea relations identifies an individual of significance – Lin Hua'an (also known as Billy Lin).<sup>139</sup> Lin, a native of Fujian province, reportedly moved to Papua New Guinea in 1994 and became a citizen in 2016.<sup>140</sup> Like Zhao in Fiji, Lin has a complex profile that includes legitimate business activities, links to China's united front system, and reported connections to criminality.<sup>141</sup> Lin is also a 'Senior Officer of the Royal Papua New Guinea Reserve Police' and is reported to have played a key role in various forms of policing engagement between China and Papua New Guinea, including donations and training initiatives.<sup>142</sup>

The inclusion of these individuals in police training initiatives is consistent with China's wider united front approach, particularly in South East Asia and the Pacific. In this approach, alleged criminal linkages may be tolerated providing there is sufficient benefit to the party-state. This raises questions associated with such engagement, principally the possibility of police compromise through association with criminality. ■



The image shows Lin (centre) in Papua New Guinea police uniform involved in a law enforcement training event, reportedly in China.

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## Two seemingly different trajectories: Fiji and Solomon Islands

Unlike the countries discussed individually above, Fiji and Solomon Islands are examined together because, at different moments over the past decade, each has occupied the position of China's closest policing partner in the Pacific. Fiji was long regarded as Beijing's principal law enforcement interlocutor in the region. More recently, that role has shifted to Solomon Islands. Their respective trajectories illustrate how policing relationships with the PRC are not static but evolve over time, shaped by domestic political change, diplomatic realignments, security crises and the actions of external partners. If read in parallel, the two cases demonstrate the fluidity of China–Pacific policing engagement and the multiple factors that can accelerate, redirect or constrain it.

'China-Solomon Islands relations stand at the forefront in the region with outstanding achievements,' proudly announced H.E. Cai Weiming, China's Ambassador in Honiara, during the Chinese New Year of the Horse celebrations in February 2026.<sup>143</sup>

At the time of writing, most observers would agree that Solomon Islands enjoys the closest relationship with the PRC among Pacific Island countries, spanning the political, economic and security domains. This has not always been the case. However, 'the switch' – i.e. Honiara's 2019 decision to end the recognition of Taiwan – marked the beginning of a new era. Of particular relevance to this study, this decision coincided with substantive Chinese policing assistance to the Melanesian country, including the deployment of a Chinese Police Liaison Team (CPLT) from 2022, and at least 70 training programmes between 2022 and October 2025.<sup>144</sup> As of late 2025, the CPLT consisted of a 14-strong 'small but agile' team operating on a six- to nine-month rotation.<sup>145</sup>

Prior to this dramatic shift, Fiji was widely considered to have the closest policing relationship with the PRC, before relations cooled down under the current administration of Prime Minister Sitiveni



Front page of Solomon Islands' newspaper *The Island Sun*, 16 February 2026. © *The Island Sun*

Rabuka.<sup>146</sup> Examining the trajectory of the two countries in parallel is helpful because, at first glance, they appear to follow very different paths in relation to Chinese police cooperation. Their experience also speaks to the fluid, fluctuating dynamics of the relationships, which offers insights relevant for other regional countries, while acknowledging country-specific circumstances.

Through the 2010s to the present, relations between China and both Fiji and Solomon Islands have warmed and cooled at different moments. This has resulted in an ebb and flow of police cooperation, beginning in 2011 when the Fiji Police Force signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the MPS.<sup>147</sup> Over the years that followed, various forms of policing activity developed between Fiji and China. Examples include a visit by the Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department to the Pacific nation in 2012, and a three-million RMB donation consisting of vehicles, antiriot equipment, communication equipment, monitors, camp beds, and sleeping bags in 2014.<sup>148</sup> A further two-million RMB donation included motorbikes and digital monitoring systems the following year, as well as further donations of drones and servers connecting CCTV cameras to the police monitoring network.<sup>149</sup> Training has been a cornerstone of PRC policing assistance. Under the MOU, MPS officers have also provided training in Fiji on subjects such as criminal investigations and international cooperation.<sup>150</sup> A Fijian officer who had attended a 20-strong cohort training course on cyber investigations in Nanjing in 2017 later recalled that the three-week programme mainly demonstrated Chinese procedures rather than providing actual training. According to the officer, had the Fijian forces wanted real training, they would have had to formally request it once back home. There was therefore a sense of disillusionment that the trip had been a box-ticking exercise under the MOU.<sup>151</sup>

Relations between Fiji and China remained broadly positive both in the policing and wider diplomatic realm as the 2010s proceeded. In September 2018 Fijian Police received training on combatting drug trafficking in Yunnan, and in 2019, Chinese media congratulated Fijian authorities for confiscating diplomatic licence plates from the Taiwanese representative office and forcing it to change its name.<sup>152</sup> Meanwhile, Solomon Islands' relationship with China gained immediate global attention in 2019. In September of that year, it was widely reported that Solomon Islands would 'sever diplomatic ties with Taiwan and align itself with Beijing'.<sup>153</sup> Local dynamics, in addition to more significant geo-political themes, were part of the equation. The diplomatic switch should be considered, at least in part, through the prism of tensions between Malaita province (the most populous in the country) and Guadalcanal province where the central government is based. Violent unrest – including fierce anti-Chinese elements – was explained by Malaita's opposition to the diplomatic switch, as well as high unemployment and crowded housing.<sup>154</sup>

The civil unrest and action taken in the aftermath represent a critical juncture in China's policing cooperation in the region, and arguably beyond. The disturbance prompted Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji to send a 150-strong regional mission to the country. China's first engagement came in the form of a donation that included 'antiriot gear – such as shields, helmets, batons and other 'nonlethal' equipment – as well as offering to send police advisers'.<sup>155</sup> In the months that followed, China deployed a CPLT, reportedly at the request of the Solomon Islands government.<sup>156</sup> This engagement paved the way for an even more formalized relationship. In March 2022, what appeared to be a leaked security pact between Solomon Islands and China found its way onto social media.<sup>157</sup> Considered an important turning point in the evolution of the Chinese party-state's positioning on security in the region, the pact 'marked a departure for Beijing, signalling its increasing willingness to play a much larger and potentially riskier role in regional security affairs and put its security forces in harm's way'.<sup>158</sup> In the same month, the PRC Police-Royal Solomon Islands Police Force Training Programme was

launched, featuring modules on, among others, equipment familiarisation training, close protection and public order management, delivered in-country.<sup>159</sup> In addition, the RSIPF have received training at Fujian Police College on unarmed tactics, the use of weapons, police operation command and onsite command, large-scale event planning and control administration. While in China, RSIPF officers also had the opportunity to visit police stations and were briefed on the security plans for large scale events such as the Beijing Olympic Game and the G20 Hangzhou Summit, with the view to drawing lessons for the 2023 Pacific Games held in Honiara.<sup>160</sup> The CPLT also delivered training in Honiara ahead of the Games besides deploying PRC police during the event.<sup>161</sup>

While increased Chinese party-state activity beyond its traditional policing and security role in the region generated concern among Western powers, one of the most notable media responses to the emerging exchange came from the Chinese side. Referring to some of the key themes explored in this report, a People's Daily piece on 3 April 2018 responded explicitly to criticism from the US and Australia. The article was published under 'Zhong Sheng' (钟声), a homonym in Chinese for the 'voice of China' and 'a pen name used in the paper since November 2008 for important pieces on international affairs on which the leadership wishes to register its view'.<sup>162</sup> The article accuses the US and Australia of spreading various fallacies, and 'putting pressure on the Solomon Islands government, discrediting China's normal cooperation and even making naked threats. All kinds of fallacies spread by the United States, Australia and other countries are not only untenable, but also expose their own deep-seated power mentality and hegemonic thinking'.<sup>163</sup> Conveying the manner in which Beijing would like its activity in the region to be perceived, the article goes on, 'security cooperation focuses on maintaining social order, protecting people's lives and property, humanitarian assistance, and natural disaster response, and is committed to helping other countries to strengthen their own security capacity building,' before asserting, 'the discerning eye will know who is creating troubles and provoking regional tensions and who is sincerely helping island countries develop'.<sup>164</sup>

In November 2022, China's Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong co-chaired, along with Anthony Veke, Minister of Police, National Security and Correctional Services of Solomon Islands, the first minister-level dialogue on law enforcement and police cooperation between China and various Pacific Island nations. Placing Chinese engagement in a regional context, representatives from Solomon Islands and Fiji attended, along with officials from Vanuatu, Kiribati, Tonga and Papua New Guinea.<sup>165</sup> The meeting suggested that China's policing and security engagement in the region had reached a new high. However, only a matter of weeks later, newly elected Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka flipped on policing cooperation stating that 'our system of democracy and justice systems are different so we will go back to those that have similar systems with us'.<sup>166</sup>

Predictably, this move prompted a response from the Chinese side, again revealing something of Beijing's framing and justification of the issues at hand. The statement from the embassy merits extended quotation, declaring:

China has carried out different forms of military and police cooperation with many developing countries whose systems are not same as China, all of which are premised on respecting the wishes and actual needs of the countries concerned. China never imposes its will on others. Over the past years, China-Fiji military and police cooperation has effectively enhanced Fiji's capacity building in related fields. It does not conflict with Fiji's existing bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms, has not brought any harm to Fiji, and has been highly praised by the Fijian side... We firmly believe that China-Fiji relations, including the military and police cooperation, will not be disrupted or destructed by any external force.

As Sino-Fijian relations – in policing cooperation and beyond – seemed to weaken (although the cooperation agreement was put under review rather than being completely abandoned), China's relations with Solomon Islands were strengthened further in July 2023 with the visit of then Prime Minister Sogavare to Beijing. The joint statement issued after the meeting referred directly to continued Chinese support for Solomon Islands' law enforcement capacity, and it was reported that additional documents on police cooperation were signed.<sup>167</sup> One of the related provisions was the ability to call on Solomon Islands-based PRC police officers to contain riots, such as those that had occurred in Honiara's Chinatown in 2021 and on other occasions.<sup>168</sup> Notably, shortly after the 2021 incidents, the Chinese embassy requested permission to bring in weapons and a security detail – whose members would hold diplomatic status – to protect Chinese diplomats from future targeting. The request was denied,<sup>169</sup> but it aligns with broader Chinese intent to strengthen its policing presence on the ground to protect its own nationals and interests. In an apparent sign of domestic uncertainty regarding policing cooperation with China, Fiji reinstated the 2011 MOU in March 2024 before ordering Chinese police out of the country later in the same month.<sup>170</sup> After reviewing the terms, then Home Affairs Minister Pio Tikoduadua announced that Fiji would in fact uphold the agreement while adding, 'there will only be Fijian officers training in China and no embedding of Chinese officers in the Fiji police force now'.<sup>171</sup> At the same time, Tevita Ralulu, a senior investigator in Suva, told *The Guardian* that 'current service in the Fiji police force is not working out right now because we had copied Singaporean and Chinese kind of system, which is not relevant'. He added that, 'we are supposed to have our own culture of service and to modify a system to suit the culture of people living in Fiji, that's why the training done in China really did not work'.<sup>172</sup> Less than two weeks after the announcement, Prime Minister Rabuka told journalists that Chinese officers embedded in the Pacific nation's police force had been removed.<sup>173</sup>

As of early 2026, basic operational cooperation remains with the Chinese police liaison officer based at the embassy in Suva, usually when Chinese nationals are arrested. There are speculations that direct communication with the office of Fiji Police Commissioner – under the guise of discussing issues affecting the Chinese community – might be used as a pretext to influence the commissioner in the hope (so far unfulfilled) that he would argue in favour of reinstating the MOU.<sup>174</sup> In late 2025, Fiji Police attended training on cybercrime at the Fujian Police College, which also featured several cultural activities. However, the later offer to send officers from the College to Fiji was refused by the Fijian government. According to an insider consulted for this study, sending Fijians officers to Fujian had more to do with maintaining diplomatic relations ('keep China happy') than building law enforcement capacity.<sup>175</sup>



Pistol shooting training in China ahead of the RSIPF's participation in the UAE SWAT Challenge 2026. Photo: Royal Solomon Islands Police Force

In considering the changing dynamics of international policing cooperation in the region over the period discussed above, police officials, academics, researchers and civil servants interviewed for this report identified a number of core themes.

First and most obvious, exploring the two cases highlights the importance of avoiding a tendency to blend analysis of entire regions into a single frame. There are significant differences between Solomon Islands and Fiji. The Fiji Police Force has greater institutional capacity, and its officers are generally less in need of training. This appears to be even more the case following the return to civilian rule in 2022.<sup>176</sup> The 2011 MOU with the MPS was also more nuanced, as Fiji and the PRC



**Chinese suspects in telecom and online fraud cases are brought back to China from Fiji, August 2017.** © TPG/Getty Images

arguably enjoy a more equal relationship compared to that between Solomon Islands and China. As a result, the Chinese police presence was also more limited, with little visibility for the PRC officers. They were unable to leave their compound without the ambassador's approval and very rarely engaged with other law enforcement partners. This contrasts with Solomon Islands, where uniformed PRC police officers are present on the ground.<sup>177</sup> It is worth noting, however, that, in 2017, Chinese police carried out the extrajudicial arrest and deportation of 77 Chinese nationals from Fiji believed to be targeting fellow Chinese citizens through online and phone scams<sup>178</sup> (PRC police also extradited six Chinese-Ni-Vanuatu dual citizens from Vanuatu in 2019).<sup>179</sup>

Another important point is that the Fiji-PRC agreement was signed by then prime minister Frank Bainimarama, who had taken power through a coup and placed the country under military rule. At this time, Fijian forces stopped receiving equipment and other support from traditional partners. The PRC, as a result, became a convenient alternative.<sup>180</sup> Following the replacement of leadership in 2022, there was a clear desire for political change and a departure from the previous administration in many respects. Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka has largely been portrayed as pro-Western, but a regional expert consulted for this project posited that, after closer examination, Rabuka is not so significantly pivoting away from the PRC (including given that China remains a major economic partner). Equally, his predecessor also had some reservation vis-à-vis China, which, however, were kept under wraps.<sup>181</sup>

In Solomon Islands, Manasseh Sogavare, the prime minister at the time of 'the switch' and the subsequent pact with the PRC, has had a personally fractured relationship with key partner Australia following an AFP investigation into the Attorney General that led to Sogavare's office being raided in the mid-2000s.<sup>182</sup> Experts, therefore, have argued that his closeness to China has been partly influenced by his own predisposition against traditional partners, as well as his ability to leverage geopolitical competition to advance political interests and secure assistance.<sup>183</sup> Within this context, China's argument that Solomon Islands could express its sovereignty by expanding its range of external relationships resonated deeply.<sup>184</sup>



Drone display marking the 50th anniversary of China–Fiji diplomatic relations, Suva, 27 September 2025. *Photo supplied*

A second set of observations from experts consulted appears to demonstrate a discrepancy between the nature and goals of Chinese policing cooperation, as communicated in official documents and statements with the activity observed on the ground. In the Pacific region in particular, specialists and practitioners sense an overriding Chinese party-state objective to secure a presence in order to police Chinese citizens abroad.<sup>185</sup> The sense of this discrepancy is reinforced by conversations with one Solomon Islands police official who suggested that, despite knowledge that serious drug issues were connected to loggers in the region, the CPLT was not interested in pursuing the apparent wrongdoing.<sup>186</sup> This sits awkwardly with the declared aims that place crime prevention at the centre.

The same police official discussed the training received, noting that they had received training from both China and Australia. The official felt that, in both cases, the training was not particularly useful. The official explained that the training often relates to tools they do not have access to and issues they cannot address because of legislative gaps. This impression of the training's usefulness was supported by a police officer from a Western country who has experience in such sessions. That officer felt that the training often felt like a box-ticking exercise, learning about 'macho' topics when there is a far greater need for training relating to road traffic accidents, domestic violence and even administrative matters.<sup>187</sup> The 40-day Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) training received by the RSIPF in China to prepare for the SWAT Challenge 2026 arguably fits this category. The RSIPF, the only force from Oceania at the Dubai-based event, came 89th out of 109 participating teams.<sup>188</sup> A senior law enforcement officer argued that the focus on SWAT was symptomatic of CPLT's recent shift towards tactical capabilities. As of January 2026, three groups of 20 RSIPF officers have taken training in China since 2024. Perhaps a coincidence, 2024 was when the remaining members of the Solomon Islands International Assistance Force (SIAF) – consisting of AFP and Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel and who had been in Solomon Islands since 2021 – ended their mission.<sup>189</sup>

Although present throughout the relationship, issues relating to 'high' and 'low' policing (discussed earlier in the Global Context section) become most apparent in the training provided. Here, the emphasis on the regime-security element of high policing, as well as a focus on more 'exciting' policing activity,

comes at the expense of training connected to much needed 'low' policing in the community. Finally, on training, one academic familiar with the phenomenon, as well as a foreign civil servant, commented that in both of the countries explored here, and in many cases in the region, the training trips that involve visits to China are considered little more than 'junkets', in contrast to training completed in Australia where participants are expected to do 'proper work'.<sup>190</sup> This was confirmed in interviews with law enforcement in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Tonga.<sup>191</sup>

As a final note on training, it has been pointed out that one of the aims of PRC training is to 'wow' participants with cultural events and warm and generous hospitality, while also showcasing Chinese culture and development.<sup>192</sup> This has proven to be an effective 'public diplomacy tool'<sup>193</sup> with attendees returning to their countries of origin enthused by the experience and therefore speaking positively about their host to colleagues, families and friends, which in turns improves the local perception of China. However, the approach taken by other training partners is not entirely dissimilar. A very senior RSIPF officer, who had trained in both China and Australia and experienced their very different approaches, suggested that the two (and indeed all partners) had something in common: attempting to 'indoctrinate' participants and sway them to favour their country and policing model over others'. This is in line with the MPS' mandate to promote China's vision as part of its training offering. While the term 'indoctrinate' might sound excessive, the interviewee highlighted a practical implication: when RSIPF officers return home, they need to be reminded that they only serve Solomon Islands, no one else.<sup>194</sup>

It should be noted that placing different partners on the same level may be a common narrative among Pacific Islanders, but it can also lead into a false equivalence. The latter, arguably, aligns with CCP's objectives. Treating competing policing models as equivalent risks obscuring the reality of China's intent to reshape global security governance and the incompatibility between its authoritarian model and the democratic values upheld by Pacific Island countries.



## AN UNLIKELY NICHE: COMMUNITY POLICING

Community policing, as referenced earlier in this report is the preferred approach to policing of Pacific Islanders, who have adopted and adapted international community policing models to suit their specific contexts.<sup>195</sup>

The concept dates back to the 1980s in the United States and the United Kingdom, but an internationally agreed upon definition remains elusive. Most would agree that 'community policing is about police engagement with the community, through restructuring police organisations and altering the daily activities of operational police officers'.<sup>196</sup> This approach in turn builds trust. Yet, when it comes to on-the-ground implementation, community policing represents 'many things to many people'.<sup>197</sup>

In the Pacific, community policing by formal police forces intersects with traditional forms of conflict resolution and is carried out in partnership with, or alongside, informal social structures. This blended approach is particularly needed in areas where state presence is weak or absent due to capacity constraints, limited resources, or geographical factors. It has produced innovative forms of local-level governance, including in the provision of security, as documented by academics Sinclair Dinnen and Miranda Forsyth in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu.<sup>198</sup> In practical terms, this has given rise to 'policing assemblages' where different forms of authority perform policing functions, including the state, community, church or customary authorities. Notably, these arrangements are not static and evolve over time.<sup>199</sup> The community policing committees consisting of local villagers (rather than police officers), which are discussed in the following pages, should be understood in this context.

China's own model of community policing – the *Fengqiao* experience detailed in the box below – has, to some extent, and with some modifications, made inroads in Solomon Islands. In 2025, the MPS sent an advisory team on a 190-day tour of the country, promoting the *Fengqiao* experience to dozens of communities and schools.<sup>200</sup> Then, in September, official Solomon Islands channels announced the *Fengqiao*-inspired Solomon Islands-China Police Cooperation Model Communities.<sup>201</sup> The media release drew considerable international attention and prompted a social media backlash locally. After all, as illustrated in the previous sections, MPS practices are hardly ever equated with community policing. The RSIPF felt the need to clarify this matter. In a social media statement, the RSIPF underscored Solomon Islands' ownership of the initiative under its Crime Prevention Strategy and sought to dispel the belief that the Chinese approach placed emphasis on surveillance and coercion when,

in fact, it was described as a 'grassroots governance model'. The latter, according to the statement, was culturally compatible with Solomon Islands' values centred around 'strong family ties, community cohesion, and collective responsibility'.<sup>202</sup>

Fieldwork conducted in this area in early 2026 proved particularly revealing. The researchers gained access to and conducted interviews with three communities, including Fighter One, which was at the centre of the September backlash, and two others receiving direct CPLT support which, for the first time, were able to share their community policing experience. This novel evidence allowed us to reassess some existing narratives surrounding Chinese involvement in community policing in the country.

The stories of the three communities presented in the following pages share some clear commonalities and offer some overarching lessons. First, antisocial behaviour and local disturbances are the communities' main concerns. Second, the absence or limited presence of formal authority encourages community-level responses to public safety problems under the guide of community committees. Third, China is quick to identify gaps to fill, for example when other donors are focusing elsewhere and adapts its approach when it encounters local resistance. Fourth, Chinese support in the community policing space is appreciated by recipient communities and has contributed to some tangible, albeit imperfect, improvements to community safety (especially given that the RSIPF often does not respond to requests and referrals from the communities, as admitted by one officer).<sup>203</sup> Fifth, China's influence at the community level is arguably greater than other partners, and some communities are now specifically requesting supplies from China.<sup>204</sup> Sixth, although the communities interviewed acknowledged that, given their many needs, they would gladly accept assistance from virtually any donor, they retain agency and are able to push back when the assistance on offer does not align with their needs or values.

On the latter point, it is worth acknowledging that as China attempts to further build its reputation as a trusted reliable partner, current resistance towards fingerprinting and CCTVs envisioned as part of *Fengqiao* might subside. In this case, the promise to address local nuisance might influence people to overlook the wider implications of introducing surveillance methods.<sup>205</sup>

## The *Fengqiao* Experience

Much coverage of China's law enforcement interaction with Solomon Islands has focused on the '*Fengqiao* experience'.<sup>206</sup> What is it?

According to the official line in China, the *Fengqiao* township in Zhejiang Province, PRC, developed a local dispute resolution model in the 1960s.<sup>207</sup> Endorsed by Mao as an effective way of 'mobilizing and relying on the public to settle issues themselves without the need to refer them to higher authorities', the model was rolled out nationally. Unsurprisingly, given its origins, the model is, at its core, a method to carry out the on-site 'rectification' of 'reactionary elements' in society.<sup>208</sup> At the time, methods included mass

participation in public denunciation and humiliation of perceived enemies, practices associated with *struggle sessions* (批鬥).<sup>209</sup>

Having been little mentioned for decades, the *Fengqiao* experience underwent a revival under Xi Jinping, dating from the 18th CCP National Congress in 2012.<sup>210</sup> The more recent incarnation of the model involves 'new grassroots initiatives for self-management and correction'.<sup>211</sup> Activities under the *Fengqiao* model have included court officials travelling to localities to mediate legal and quasi-legal disputes; the establishment of 'People's *Fengqiao*-style courts'; and the police force being given 'additional flexibility towards

dispute resolution and grassroots frictions, while opening up community-level governance to surveillance'.<sup>212</sup>

Wider analysis of the model suggests that this revival under Xi, at least within China, is about 'mobilizing the public – including through new digital tools – in order to better achieve the Party's governance objectives, including public security'.<sup>213</sup>

In a world of strained local budgets and growing costs of law enforcement and dispute resolution, it is not difficult to see the appeal of a model that claims to resolve issues of this nature cheaply and efficiently, in China and beyond. However, there are risks in the model itself and in transplanting it to other territories. Although local actors are

empowered, 'the process is strongly guided by directives and ideology from the central party-state', for example.<sup>214</sup> The approach also entails significant hazards related to the abandonment of standardized criteria and reliance on subjective judgements.<sup>215</sup>

The export of this model to Solomon Islands represents a significant step for China and its various models of governance. It appears to be well supported, with Chinese academics writing that *Fengqiao*-style policing 'presents a groundbreaking framework for grassroots public security governance with significant global potential'.<sup>216</sup> Likewise, the experiment has been favourably covered in China's domestic media, again suggesting significant establishment support.<sup>217</sup> ■

## Fighter One

Fighter One is a community on the eastern outskirts of Honiara that made domestic and international headlines in September 2025 as the site where China had allegedly launched a pilot model, jointly with the RSIPF, for community policing inspired by the *Fengqiao* experience.<sup>218</sup> Beijing had been implementing the model domestically for decades, and this would have been the first trial in the Pacific. Elements envisaged as part of *Fengqiao* include 'population management, household registration, community mapping, and the collection of fingerprints and palm prints'. Fingerprinting and data collection have drawn particularly negative public reactions.

It emerged that a local member of the RSIPF had facilitated contact with the CPLT, which subsequently conducted two awareness sessions on *Fengqiao*. Besides describing how the model is implemented within China, the CPLT offered to provide the following to Fighter One:

- Fingerprinting
- CCTVs
- Smart policing to collect household data
- Life skills training for women (sewing, cooking)
- Sport programmes for the youth
- A community building that could serve as a permanent RSIPF post

The community committee declined the offer which, although appealing on several levels, raised significant concerns related to fingerprinting. In other words, the so-called 'pilot programme' so widely discussed in the media never progressed beyond two preliminary meetings, according to those interviewed.

Fighter One has, however, long implemented its own system of local governance based on bylaws. Within the community, there was palpable frustration over the media attention, with unannounced journalists taking unauthorized pictures of community members (including children) and incorrect

reporting. They felt they had been instrumentalized in the context of geopolitical competition between China and the West (often identified locally as 'Australia') and that 'competition between donors is not leading to better policing'. In the future, the community plans to approach Australia for support, for example, to provide street lighting to increase safety. If Australia were to decline, they would approach China.<sup>219</sup>

Interestingly, during one of GI-TOC's meetings with RSIPF only two days prior to the Fighter One visit, the pilot still appeared to be under consideration, with plans for a wider roll out if successful. These included a livelihood component in the form of farming training to address unemployment, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and with China's financial backing.<sup>220</sup> However, at the time of writing, Fighter One residents report no signs of *Fengqiao* implementation in their community.

## Western Honiara Community Policing Committee

The Western Honiara Community Policing Committee (WHCPC) operates in the western part of the capital and oversees 28 communities (informal settlements). Western Honiara is the only constituency in the city with a formalized community policing programme.

It appeared that, when the CPLT was unable to implement its community policing model in Fighter One, it looked to support existing community initiatives elsewhere, and that in Western Honiara is the first of such initiatives. This engagement started in December 2025.<sup>221</sup>

Committee chairman Wilson Mamae explained that the WHCPC had long been implementing community policing based on bylaws. In late 2025, it decided to formalize its community policing approach. This was prompted by a strong desire to 'keep the Police Response Team (PRT) out of the community'.<sup>222</sup> Notably, in the course of several interviews, RSIPF's PRT, which is a tactical unit, was often mentioned in negative terms due to its allegedly brutal methods. It is seen as fundamentally different from the broader RSIPF and evidently much disliked.

In the leadup to the 2025 Christmas festivities, the WHCPC approached 'all the embassies' seeking support for some planned activities. New Zealand supported sporting events (prizes, soft drinks), whereas the CPLT provided uniforms and torchlights. There were no discussions about CCTV or fingerprinting. The community felt confident that 'if we ask, China will deliver'. The WHCPC's chairman intended to test this belief further: 'I am going to call their leader [CPLT's]. If he delivers next time, China will become our partner of choice'.<sup>223</sup>

Overall, there was a sense that *any* donor providing 'good things for the community' was welcome.<sup>224</sup>

## Agape Community Policing Committee

Agape is one of the 28 communities within western Honiara. It is where the CPLT has had the greatest engagement.<sup>225</sup> Their path to community policing offers useful context and helps explain the conditions that favour the entry of the CPLT into the community policing space. To note, once again, 'any help is welcome' is the recurring theme. As such, it is reasonable to speculate that, had the RSIPF introduced partners other than the CPLT to the Agape community, their support would have also been well received.

According to the RSIPF, the Agape experience is being evaluated with the view to possibly expanding it. This aligns with wider plans to establish community policing committees across the country to work closely with the RSIPF. The latter wants to operationalize its crime prevention strategy, which means all officers, including frontliners and investigators, will be expected to engage in crime prevention. In the longer term, all police stations will have community policing officers.<sup>226</sup>

From the RSIPF's perspective, community policing is considered a proactive form of crime prevention.

## The pre-CPLT era

The men<sup>227</sup> who engaged with the researchers during the study explained that Agape had a long history of social order problems, and that women and children in particular felt insecure in their own community. Alcohol abuse, drunk and disorderly activities were out of control. As a result, frequent fist fights and property damage occurred, and the community was labelled by the RSIPF as 'red zone', that is, very unstable and unsafe.<sup>228</sup>

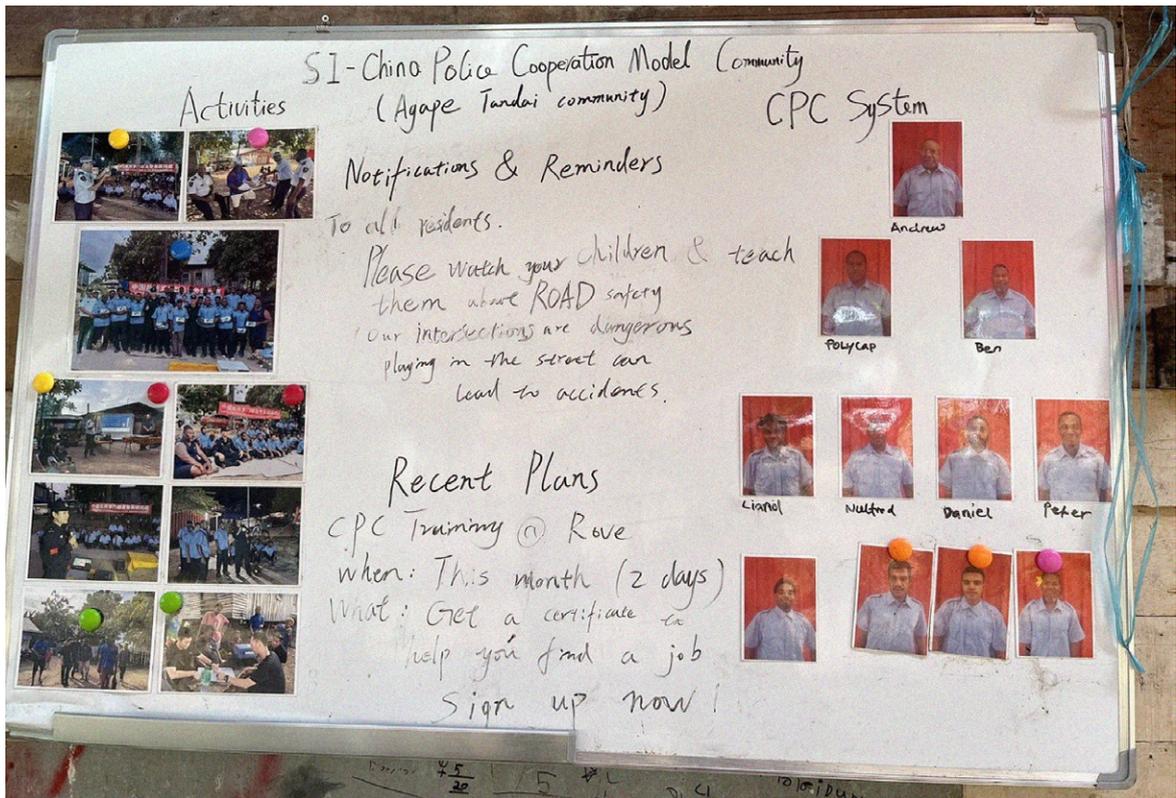
In 2019, the RSIPF rolled out their Crime Prevention and Community Policing initiative. Under this programme, the RSIPF Community Policing Department held a series of meetings in the community to discuss participation. Community members, especially women, expressed strong support. On this basis, the community elected a committee representing elders, women and youth, which was tasked with organizing the community and liaising with RSIPF to implement community policing. The committee also began developing a constitution to give legal powers to committee members as well as to develop community bylaws (2023) to guide their conduct. The constitution also included provisions for the committee to enforce the set of community bylaws and request support from the police on serious matters.

Empowered by the constitution, the committee and community members worked collaboratively to address social order challenges and enhance security and peace within the community. However, the work was carried out on a voluntary basis and gradually became unsustainable. This created difficulties for committee members, who needed to prioritize earning income to support their families. As a result, the time and energy devoted to committee activities steadily declined, and social order problems began to reemerge. The risk of the community sliding back into a 'red zone' classification became a serious concern for community leaders and women alike.

## CPLT participation

In 2024, the community committee requested support from RSIPF Community Policing Department, which responded positively with assistance from the CPLT. The latter delivered sports equipment for youth, solar-powered street lighting, torches, uniforms, and continued to engage with Agape throughout 2024. In 2025, the CPLT proposed sharing its experience of a Chinese community policing model, which was accepted by the community.

Starting in May 2025, the CPLT delivered a number of awareness sessions on their community policing model and explained the need to profile community households and members, including fingerprinting, photo IDs and CCTV monitoring. In one of the community consultations, they also demonstrated fingerprinting.



Activity board and team structure, Solomon Islands–China Police Cooperation Model Community, Agape Tandai community, 26 January 2026. Photo supplied

As of late January 2026, the CPLT had visited the community four times, during which it:

- Trained locals on how to deal with violent offenders within the community
- Delivered uniforms and torches for the 11-strong local community policing team (see picture above)
- Conducted household surveys (capturing data for reasons the community was unclear or uneasy about)
- Installed street lighting but did not provide replacement batteries, and lights are now no longer functioning
- Donated three sewing machines and cooking equipment, promising to train women on how to operate them (yet to be done), as well as volleyballs for children

There has been no explicit discussion regarding the introduction of CCTV, but fingerprinting appears to be an option for the future and a further source of concern.

Many Agape women<sup>229</sup> claimed to feel safe and reported no issues following the introduction of CLPT-supported community policing carried out by local community members. Although two local women are part of the community policing team, they had not received any training, unlike male counterparts. In addition, the women felt that the CPLT only interacted with the elders of the community (all male) and, therefore, had very little knowledge of plans and activities. The same applied to the only female CPLT officer deployed in Solomon Islands, who had not engaged with the women. Many expressed a strong desire for life skills, as most were unemployed.<sup>230</sup>

## Community attitudes

While men and women initially spoke positively about China and indeed appeared eager to continue the collaboration with the CPLT on the basis that ‘they are easy to work with’, the conversation progressed later revealed some ambivalence towards China. ‘Solomon Islands is democratic, China is different, we do not really understand them.’ At the same time, China is the only donor that ever visited the community, according to those interviewed, and ‘any’ help is welcome.<sup>231</sup>

The above aligns with sentiments captured during several other interviews with the RSIPF, government and other local stakeholders. Australia and New Zealand are seen as a more natural and culturally aligned partners for Solomon Islands, and many are suspicious of China’s intentions. Yet, China generally delivers more of what community say they need at a local level. As in other areas, China is adept at identifying opportunities and filling gaps. Community policing is not an AFP priority. The CPLT, on the other hand, appears determined to make community policing its niche and expand its engagement with communities around the country. The only limitation to China’s expansion in community policing, especially given that AFP’s engagement outside of Honiara is limited and that community policing is not an AFP priority, is that people are still wary of it. To counter this, the CPLT is opting to go through existing initiatives, such as those in western Honiara, and slowly gaining trust or, as some have argued, ‘winning hearts and minds’.<sup>232</sup>



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**T**he South Pacific today stands at the intersection of policing assistance, geopolitical competition and assertive local agency. China's growing law enforcement engagement in the region is neither an isolated phenomenon nor an anomaly. It is part of a broader evolution in Beijing's global security posture, one that integrates diplomatic influence-building, protection of overseas nationals, diaspora management and strategic competition into a comprehensive security framework.

China's approach in the Pacific has generally been opportunistic, responding to political openings and moments of instability. It is characterized by rapid delivery, limited explicit governance conditionality and an emphasis on tangible outputs: infrastructure, vehicles, equipment and short-term training. Assistance is often closely connected to the protection of Chinese citizens and commercial interests. At the same time, Beijing has demonstrated adaptability. Experiences in countries such as Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands suggest that PRC actors adjust their tactics according to political context, local resistance and the density of existing partnerships. Where assertive approaches generate pushback, more measured engagement often follows.

For Pacific Island countries, engagement with China in the policing domain presents a complex mix of benefits and risks. The challenge for Pacific leaders is not whether to engage, but how to engage in ways that preserve sovereignty, community trust and long-term institutional integrity.

### **Benefits and risks to Pacific countries, police forces and communities**

Pacific police forces have gained through cooperation with China. Whether these will prove to be only short-term benefits, as some argue, or whether they will be outweighed by some of the risks listed below, has yet to be fully determined. The interviews conducted for this project were a stark reminder that ideology, sometimes more than empirical evidence, shapes assessments.

The benefits included in this section are based on observations from around the region and are not intended to diminish the long-standing and impactful contributions of traditional partners who continue to be the main contributors to regional security. Equally, they are not intended to overshadow

the risks. On the contrary, the list below, although not exhaustive, provides an indication of the main risks associated with engaging with China in the policing sphere. Importantly, these risks do not automatically materialize. They depend on domestic oversight, legal safeguards, transparency mechanisms and the capacity of Pacific institutions to define and enforce clear parameters of cooperation. Indeed, strengthening internal institutional capacity (legislation, human resources that are competent and accountable, overall transparency and accountability), leads to strong institutions that truly serve the interests of the population and are better placed to manage engagement with both the PRC and a whole range of partners.<sup>233</sup>

BENEFITS	
<b>Filling resource gaps</b>	Many Pacific police forces operate with chronic shortages of vehicles, forensic tools, communications equipment and infrastructure. PRC assistance often provides these rapidly and at low or no direct financial cost.
<b>Exposure to training and new skills</b>	Access to overseas training, including in areas such as cybercrime, forensics and drug enforcement, can expand professional competencies, particularly where alternative opportunities are limited.
<b>Operational cooperation on transnational crime</b>	Given China's central role in global supply chains, including the production of precursor chemicals used in synthetic drugs, cooperation may assist Pacific states confronting rising drug trafficking challenges. Additionally, PRC authorities might be the only actors possessing detailed information regarding Chinese nationals operating 'grey' businesses and criminal syndicates in the Pacific Islands.
<b>Diversification of partnerships</b>	Engaging multiple partners enhances strategic autonomy. Pacific leaders have consistently emphasized the importance of maintaining diversified relationships rather than exclusive alignments: 'friends to all, enemies to none'.
<b>Political leverage</b>	The presence of alternative partners can strengthen Pacific governments' negotiating positions vis-à-vis external actors.
RISKS	
<b>Normative divergence</b>	China's policing model is rooted in a system where regime security and stability maintenance take precedence over liberal rule-of-law traditions. Exposure to approaches emphasising surveillance, coercive crowd control or ideological training may gradually influence institutional culture, particularly in resource-constrained environments.
<b>Institutional fragmentation</b>	Accepting multiple parallel assistance streams without coordination mechanisms can create duplication, conflicting doctrines or institutional strain within small police forces.
<b>Technology and data vulnerabilities</b>	The integration of Chinese-supplied surveillance systems, biometric databases or digital infrastructure may create long-term dependencies. Concerns include data sovereignty, cybersecurity vulnerabilities and potential external access to sensitive information.
<b>Diaspora-linked pressures</b>	Cooperation tied to diaspora management or the protection of Chinese nationals may blur the lines between legitimate policing and politically sensitive activities. There is a risk that Pacific jurisdictions could become entangled in external political agendas, including efforts to monitor or pressure individuals.
<b>Reputational and geopolitical costs</b>	Deepening engagement with any one partner may trigger perceptions of alignment, domestically or externally, potentially affecting diplomatic flexibility. This hazard is even more serious when that partner is associated with ideological rigidity and concentration of powers.

**FIGURE 2** Main benefits and risks associated with engaging with China in the policing sphere.

## Impact on traditional partners

China's law enforcement engagement has significant implications for traditional partners. These effects can be grouped into structural disadvantages, perceptions, risks and opportunities.

### Structural disadvantages

Traditional partners often operate under strict transparency, procurement and human rights conditionality requirements. While normatively grounded, these processes can slow delivery and reduce flexibility compared with PRC assistance. Budget cycles, parliamentary oversight and public accountability mechanisms may limit responsiveness during crises. Additionally, unlike democratic partners whose programming can be influenced by their own election cycles, China can afford to 'buy time' and 'play the long game'.<sup>234</sup>

Some have argued that Western partners are at an advantage as English-speaking countries; some Pacific leaders and senior police officers share similar opinions.<sup>235</sup> Others, however, have spoken of the ability of PRC officials to align themselves to local customs such as gift giving, notwithstanding language barriers. By adopting a less bureaucratic approach to foreign assistance and cooperation ('no strings attached'), they become trusted and (in some cases) preferred partners. In places such as Solomon Islands, it has also been suggested that Chinese advisors demonstrate better people skills than traditional partners.<sup>236</sup> This relates to the recurring theme of speed of delivery vis-à-vis training, funding, equipment and infrastructure – a race that China's less bureaucratic approach appears to win every time.

### Perceptions

In several Pacific contexts, traditional partners are perceived as bureaucratic, prescriptive or slow moving. Conversely, China is often seen as decisive and materially generous. Perception gaps, whether accurate or not, shape partner competitiveness in the policing domain.

A further perception issue concerns how, especially Western motivations, in particular, are perceived. The resurgence of interest in recent years aimed at containing China has not gone unnoticed by Pacific Islanders. 'PNG is not a project', one Papua New Guinea expert stated, pointing to the concerns the US might have only a fleeting commitment to the Melanesian country.<sup>237</sup>

### Risks

If traditional partners disengage or reduce visibility in response to China's presence, they risk ceding influence over policing norms, institutional culture and strategic direction. Fragmented assistance environments may also increase the likelihood of incompatible systems and operational tensions. As observed in other regions such as Africa,<sup>238</sup> there is the tangible risk that PRC police training promotes repressive practices and surveillance, which, apart from undermining human rights, raises questions of interoperability with forces trained by Western partners (although the value of some of the training is disputable according to interviews, partially weakening the interoperability issue).

### Opportunities

China's presence has prompted renewed attention and investment in Pacific policing by traditional partners. It has catalyzed reforms, accelerated initiatives such as regional policing cooperation frameworks, and encouraged more serious engagement with Pacific priorities.

China's growing footprint has also prompted some consideration of engagement between traditional partners and the PRC in the Pacific policing realm. Any form of engagement with an authoritarian party-state contains inherent risk, and this risk should guide any dialogue with Beijing. The law and its enforcement are ultimately tools of the Party. In addition to more obvious security and reputational hazards, there are risks connected to the possibility that engagement can be perceived as endorsement. If engagement occurs, it should remain limited in scope and modest in ambition. It could focus on avoiding misunderstandings, while potentially increasing efficiency in terms of what is delivered to the various Pacific populations. This could prevent 'doubling up' on certain training or resources, as well as establishing a channel for coordination in emergency situations such as disaster response.

## Recommendations

### For Pacific Island leaders

- Develop clear national guidelines governing foreign law enforcement assistance, including transparency requirements and parliamentary oversight.
- Invest in transparent national frameworks for managing foreign policing assistance that reduce duplication and protect sovereignty.
- Conduct regular risk assessments of foreign-supplied technology and data systems.
- Maintain diversified partnerships to preserve strategic autonomy.
- Invest in community policing principles and internal accountability mechanisms to ensure external assistance does not erode public trust.

### For traditional partner countries

- Increase agility in delivering requested equipment and infrastructure. Normative commitments to the rule of law and human rights remain foundational, but they must be accompanied by timely, visible and practical support.
- Prioritize long-term institutional strengthening over short-term visibility, even though visibility is important.
- Avoid framing Pacific engagement in binary geopolitical terms that diminish local agency.
- Support national and regional coordination platforms that enable Pacific-led agenda setting.

### For all partners

- Listen to Pacific priorities; assistance models that respond directly to locally identified needs are more sustainable and effective.
- Respect Pacific sovereignty and decision-making autonomy.
- Ensure assistance supports community safety, accountability and public trust.
- Promote transparency in agreements to reduce suspicion and misinformation.

The evolution of Chinese policing engagement in the South Pacific does not signal an inevitable realignment of the region. Rather, it highlights the agency of Pacific Island countries navigating an increasingly multipolar security environment. The central question is not whether China will remain engaged, but how Pacific institutions and their partners can ensure that all external assistance strengthens rather than undermines accountable and community-oriented policing.

In this evolving landscape, resilience, transparency and respect for sovereignty will matter more than alignment.



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