

The Chinese Police Organization at Home and Abroad



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1. Project Overview and Objectives

This brief provides an overview of the Chinese policing system from its organization and functions at home to the recent expansion of policing activities abroad. Efforts of Chinese police to build connections in foreign countries have been growing for decades, but the issue reached peak salience in the Netherlands in 2022 when local news media reported that Chinese “police service stations” were operating on Dutch soil.¹ That fall, news organizations around the world were pursuing stories that highlighted the findings of a report authored by a human rights non-governmental organization (NGO), Safeguard Defenders. The report presented evidence of Chinese police service stations in at least 29 countries across five continents,² sparking concern among some governments about the purpose and intent of the stations. In the Netherlands, foreign ministry spokesperson Maxime Hovenkamp publicly announced an investigation by the Dutch government on October 26, 2022.³

The news also generated academic and policy interest in the overseas activities of Chinese police. In April 2023, the Leiden Asia Center released a report on a study authored by Frank Pieke that chronicled Chinese government influence on diaspora members in the Netherlands and included questions about Chinese police presence overseas.⁴ The majority of respondents said they did not know about the overseas police stations prior to fall 2022, but they almost unanimously interpreted the police stations as an attempt by the Chinese government to intimidate members of the diaspora. This brief provides insight into the functions and purpose

¹ For one of the first reports, see Door Onderzoeksredactie, “China Heft Illegal Politiebureaus in Nederland: Aanwijzingen voor Intimidatie,” RTL Nieuws, 25 October 2022, <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/onderzoek/artikel/5342214/china-illegale-politiebureaus-nederland-dissidenten-onderzoek>. Read on September 20, 2023.

² 110 Overseas: Chinese Transnational Policing Gone Wild, Safeguard Defenders, September 2022, online at <https://safeguarddefenders.com/sites/default/files/pdf/110%20Overseas%20%28v5%29.pdf>. read on September 20, 2023.

³ Reuters, “Dutch Probe ‘Illegal’ China Government Offices in Netherlands,” Reuters, 26 October 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/dutch-investigating-alleged-unlicensed-china-govt-offices-netherlands-2022-10-26/>. read on 10 October 10, 2023.

⁴ Franke Pieke, *The Influence and Interference of the People’s Republic of China among the Chinese Population in the Netherlands*, April 2023, Leiden Asia Centre.

of the overseas police stations and puts the findings of Pieke and others into perspective by delving further into the role of Chinese policing efforts in the Netherlands and abroad.

The first objective of this brief is to clarify how policing operates in China. After discussing the research methodology of the brief in Section 2, Section 3 provides an overview of the relevant history of policing in China, highlighting the broad shifts to policing needs and powers that developed during the communist transition and more recent market-oriented reforms.

Another aim of this brief is to clearly delineate the distribution of police powers in China, Section 4 outlines the organization of policing groups under the Ministry of Public Security, noting the fractures in centralization that persist within the institution. Most of the overseas police service stations that have been in the news are linked to municipal public security (police) bureaus, but due to the centralized command structure of policing in China, these city bureaus and related overseas service stations do not operate independently. Section 4 thus provides insight into how city bureaus communicate with higher levels and how the police groups work together to address issues such as stability maintenance and counterterrorism.

Understanding the distribution of policing powers in China also necessitates inquiry into related enforcement agencies. Section 5 details relevant security organizations within the Chinese government that interact with the police, and, in some cases, perform complementary or overlapping law enforcement functions.

Shifting the focus to overseas activities, Section 6 details the parameters of Chinese police interactions abroad, including the relevant departments and bilateral and multilateral partnerships. Given the diversity of these engagements, the Chinese police are involved in a wide range of overseas activity, and Section 7 describes this overseas engagement in greater detail, including international cooperation efforts such as training and joint patrols as well as crime fighting abroad. This section also describes activities at the police cooperation centers in South Africa and the now infamous police service stations that were established around the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Because the range of Chinese policing efforts abroad is so diverse, Section 8 presents three case studies of police interactions to show how international engagement plays in out in individual country settings. Governments in South Africa, Italy, and the United States have publicly confirmed interactions with police in China, but each nation has charted a different

path in developing those relations and responding to controversy. South Africa has one of the earliest documented histories of Chinese police cooperation and has maintained a more collaborative response, despite criticisms. Italy also has a documented history of cooperation with Chinese police but has recently ceased public bilateral ties. Finally, the United States has pursued a cautious approach to Chinese police engagement that has become increasingly adversarial in the wake of the police service station controversy and rising geopolitical tensions in the U.S.-China relationship.⁵ The case studies shed light on both the extent of Chinese police activity in specific settings and the outcomes that different approaches to engagement have produced.

The brief concludes with a summary of key points and final considerations.

2. Research Methodology

All source materials for this brief are publicly available online or through academic publications. The research was conducted during the summer and fall of 2023 by myself and a research assistant, Aizoelegbe Okaisabor. Due to increasing political pressures and concerns about sensitive research topics,⁶ no officers or government representatives were directly interviewed for this research. Sections 3 – 5 draw from academic sources, Chinese policing websites, and news articles and reports from a variety of publications. Some sections also include details that I previously published in my first book⁷ and a related academic review article⁸ and are noted in the text where relevant.

Sections 6-8 cover activities of Chinese police authorities abroad. Okaisabor and I first sought to verify the evidence presented in the Safeguard Defenders reports before conducting a broader global search collecting information about Chinese police activities abroad. When

⁵ Justice.gov, "Two Arrested for Operating Illegal Overseas Police Station of the Chinese Government," U.S. Department of Justice, April 17, 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-arrested-operating-illegal-overseas-police-station-chinese-government>. Read on September 18, 2023.

⁶ Sheena Chestnut Greitens, and Rory Truex. "Repressive Experiences among China Scholars: New Evidence from Survey Data." *The China Quarterly* 242 (2020): 349-375.

⁷ Suzanne E. Scoggins. *Policing China: Street-Level Cops in the Shadow of Protest*. Cornell University Press, 2021.

⁸ Suzanne E. Scoggins. "Policing Modern China." *China Law and Society Review* 3, no. 2 (2018): 79-117.

documents and articles were not in English or Chinese, we employed online translation resources to search and analyze news coverage and government documents, but the global search is nevertheless somewhat limited by language barriers. The country-by-country approach allowed us to identify three case studies of interest that aim to provide a better understanding of the scope and function of Chinese police activities overseas and present relevant recommendations for this brief.

3. Chinese Policing in Historical Context

Policing in China is an ostensibly centralized system governed by the Ministry of Public Security (MPS). Shortly following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the current incarnation of the Ministry was created in 1949 with an eye toward strengthening ideological education work and centralizing control over policing in the country, which at the time was a more loosely connected system of municipal police departments. While similar in many respects to policing models in the West, Chinese policing developed unique contours during these early years that distinguished it even from policing in the Soviet Union.⁹ Police organs were expected to adhere to and carry out duties associated with the “mass line,” a political-ideological strategy of governance that emphasized listening to and serving the masses. For the police, adherence to the mass line meant carrying out Chinese Communist Party (CCP) objectives in a wide variety of forms.

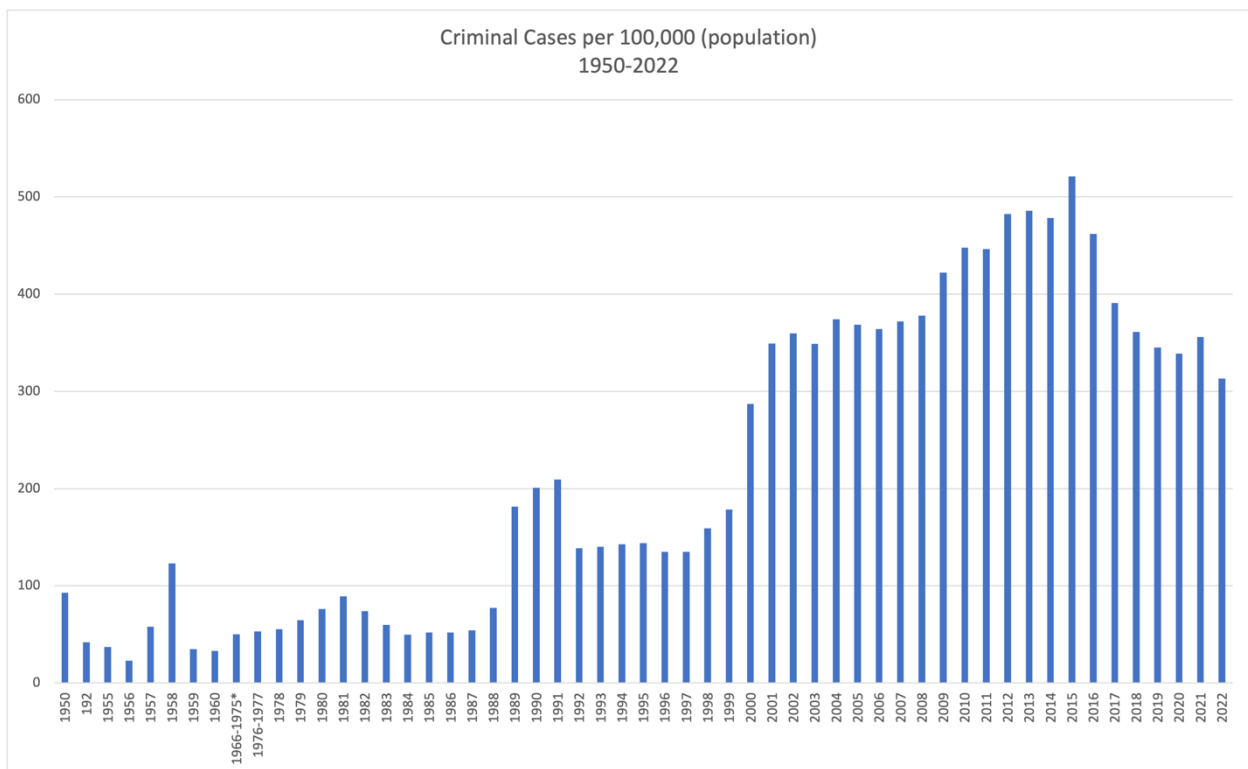
In practice, police in the early Mao Era did traditional police work such as managing violent and nonviolent crimes.¹⁰ As frontline agents of the mass line, the police also attended to political matters like investigating and making arrests of civilians engaged in activities labeled as counterrevolutionary crimes and participating in national or local campaigns that aimed to reduce crime and/or achieve political goals. Mass line-oriented policing also meant the public security organs developed a broad scope of activities and responsibilities, which at various times included fire response, prison services, and even rehabilitation work for certain types

⁹ Dutton, Michael. *Policing Chinese Politics: A History*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.

¹⁰ Parts of this paragraph and the following paragraph were previously published in Scoggins 2018.

of criminal offenders.¹¹ Police were also responsible for the household registration system (*hukou*), which keeps a record of births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and moves of all members in a household. During the Mao Era, a person's *hukou* was used to manage or restrict migration to assist agricultural collectivization and urban industrialization policies.

For the police, political work commanded a sizable percentage of their time. Throughout the Mao Era, campaigns were used frequently to address crime and manage political duties, so much so that campaigns were used nearly constantly.¹² In 1957, counter-revolutionary crime alone comprised almost half of all reported crimes in the country.¹³ Figure 1 shows the criminal case rate per 100,000 from 1950 - 2022. During the early Mao Era (1950-1966), we see relatively steady rates of crime with a spike in 1958 due to an increase in political arrests and a rise in counter-revolutionary crime. Figure 1 also shows a general rise in crime during the Reform Era (discussed below).



¹¹ Aminda Smith. *Thought Reform and China's Dangerous Classes: Reeducation, Resistance, and the People*. Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield.

¹² Dutton 2005.

¹³ Børge Bakken. "Crime, Juvenile Delinquency and Deterrence Policy in China." *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 30 (1993): 29-58.

Figure 1 - Criminal Cases in China per 100,000 People from 1950 – 2022, source: adapted from Bakken 1993, Liang 2005, and the Law Yearbooks of China.¹⁴

* Reflects the average. Crime during the Cultural Revolution ranged between 40 and 60 cases per 100,000.

The turmoil of China's Cultural Revolution greatly disrupted MPS and all policing activities in the country. In 1966, MPS leaders were purged and replaced by the new Ministry of Public Security Revolution Group.¹⁵ Officers around the country found themselves with little protection from the Red Guards and began defecting en masse. During this time, many cities were policed by the Red Guards rather than the police themselves, resulting in a public security system that was effectively disbanded for a 10-year period that scholars have termed the country's "lawless era."¹⁶ Even the civilian-staffed public security committees dispersed at this time due to safety concerns.¹⁷

Police leaders at the start of the period commonly referred to as China's Reform Era (December 1978 – Present) thus inherited a public security system in disarray. Ministry officials faced the daunting task of expanding and adapting a reconstructed police bureaucracy. In short order, they had to recruit officers and adapt to new rules set forth by the Criminal Law and Criminal Procedure Law of 1980. Many of the new recruits were former People's Liberation Army soldiers, a group that recently began retiring, further transforming China's current police force.

The 1980s and early 1990s are thus best defined as a period of rebuilding and restructuring. During these decades, Central government leaders expanded the police bureaucracy in scope, functions, and capabilities in an effort to keep pace with economic growth and changing social and political demands. Local policing was largely decentralized in the early years of reform. Individual officers had a high degree of power and discretion, and police officers who worked

¹⁴ Because most of these figures are official statistic, they significantly underrepresent actual crime, by the ministry's own admission. See Michael Dutton, and Tianfu Lee. "Missing the Target? Policing Strategies in the Period of Economic Reform." *Crime & Delinquency* 39, no. 3 (1993): 318 - 319 for a detailed discussion of reporting problems.

¹⁵ Dutton 2005, p. 220.

¹⁶ Kam C. Wong. 2009. *Chinese Policing: History and Reform*. New York: Peter Lang.

¹⁷ Yisheng Dai and Zu-Yuan Huang. 1993. "Organization and Functions of Public Security Agencies of the People's Republic of China," *Eurocriminology* 5, 137-143.

on the force during these years said they were more respected and feared by residents.¹⁸ Sometimes this individualized power led to corruption and other abuses of authority, which worried ministry officials. To address these concerns, ministry reforms were in part an effort to wrest back control from the local levels by implementing more rules and regulations to govern police behavior and law enforcement on the ground.

All of this restructuring occurred at a time of social change and rising crime. Although the reform period began with comparatively low crime rates by international standards,¹⁹ Figure 1 shows that crime began rising after 1978 as the early reforms changed the economic landscape and made large swaths of the population more mobile. Although it abated somewhat in the mid 1980s, it took off again in 1988. Many of the crimes in the 1980s and 1990s were traditional in nature, but relatively new problems such as human trafficking, drug smuggling, and arms trading that had been effectively suppressed or nonexistent during the Mao Era also proliferated.²⁰ As incomes grew, there was more to steal, giving rise to other crimes such as international money laundering, white collar crime, and corruption. Police who had once depended on a static population and neighborhood committees to keep tabs on residents and manage crime were suddenly confronted with new challenges posed by swelling city populations with young people who were poorly integrated into the employment and educational systems. Some of these “jobless wanderers and temporary workers” inevitable turned to crime,²¹ likely leading to a rise in public concerns about safety.²²

Police in the early Reform Era also returned to old methods to manage the new ways of crime. Reminiscent of the Mao Era, “hard strike” campaigns targeting criminal activities were launched throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and local governments also increased the number of neighborhood committees to assist police in urban areas. When these methods proved limited, police leaders further moved to adopt western policing practices such as street patrols

¹⁸ Scoggins 2021, p. 18.

¹⁹ Bakken 1993.

²⁰ Yue Ma. "The Police Law 1995: Organization, Functions, Powers and Accountability of the Chinese Police." *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management* 20, no. 1 (1997): 113-135.

²¹ Bakken 1993, 46.

²² Dutton and Lee 1993.

that had not been used in China prior to the 1980s.²³ As the police force centralized and modernized, Chinese police thus developed a model of policing that was focused on professionalization and management but—through campaigns and connections to local neighborhood committees—was still connected to its political roots of the past.

4. Chinese Policing in the Present Day

Organization of the Ministry of Public Security

As in earlier decades, policing in present-day China is governed by the Ministry of Public Security, a large organization that manages a wide range of policing activities in the country. The Ministry is based in Beijing and maintains provincial level bureaus at the provinces and provincial-level cities. It also governs the activities of all frontline public security bureaus, stations, and substations across the country, from the largest district stations in megacities like Beijing and Shanghai to the smallest local stations (*paichusuo*) in remote and less densely populated counties.

Like other ministries in China, the Ministry of Public Security itself is governed by the State Council, which carries out the administrative functions of the Chinese state and is currently led by Premier Li Qiang. At the top of MPS sits the Minister of Public Security, a position currently held by Wang Xiaohong. Wang was appointed in 2022 and has been described as a close ally of Xi Jinping because he was in charge of a subdistrict police bureau in Fuzhou, Fujian in the 1990s when Xi served as CCP Secretary of Fuzhou and later the vice-governor of Fujian Province.²⁴ Notably, Wang is the first career police officer to lead the ministry in 24 years. As the head of MPS, Wang also holds the rank of state councilor.²⁵

²³ Hualing Fu. "Patrol Police: A Recent Development in the People's Republic of China." *Police Stud.: Int'l Rev. Police Dev.* 13 (1990): 111.

²⁴ Jack Lau, "Close Xi Jinping Ally Appointed as China's New Public Security Chief," *South China Morning Post*, June 24, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3183027/close-xi-jinping-ally-appointed-chinas-new-public-security>. Read on October 16, 2023.

²⁵ In China, the State Council is led by the Premier. Under the Premier are the Vice-Premiers, State Councilors, the Secretary General, and the Ministries. There are currently 4 Vice-Premiers and 5 State Councilors, including Wang. See <https://english.www.gov.cn/>. Read on October 16, 2023.

Currently serving directly under the Minister of Public Security are:²⁶

- Qi Yanjun, Deputy Minister, Deputy Secretary of the MPS CCP, in charge of daily operations
- Xu Ganlu, Deputy Minister, Director of the National Immigration Administration
- Xu Datong, Deputy Minister
- Wang Zhihong, Deputy Minister
- Chen Siyuan, Deputy Minister
- Sun Maoli, Deputy Minister
- Ren Airong, Leader of the Discipline Inspection and Supervision Team, Member of the MPS CCP
- Ling Zhifeng, Director of Political Department

MPS oversees departments, bureau-level agencies, and other affiliated entities that manage a wide variety of public security matters that aim to address the diverse needs of the Chinese state. In 2019, MPS announced a significant restructuring that elevated the level of several departments to bureaus and merged or integrated certain non-case handling departments.²⁷ A *People's Public Security News* report on the restructuring characterized the reforms as an effort to build a “modern police management system that would meet the requirements of the current time period and adapt to the modernization of the national governance system.” The report also stated that the restructuring was designed to solve outstanding problems and develop combat effectiveness. Importantly, the restructuring also aimed to improve data integration and sharing, which has been a prominent concern as new technologies were introduced and adopted by various police groups. Table 1 presents the new organizational structure.

²⁶ “Resumes of the Minister, Deputy Minister, Disciplinary Inspection Team Leader and other Leaders of the Ministry of Public Security” “公安部部长、副部长、纪检组长等领导简历” <http://www.ce.cn/ztpd/xwzt/2013bw/gab/index.shtml>.

²⁷ “Major Adjustments to the Internal Structure of the Ministry of Public Security: Integrating Multiple Departments to Strengthen the Case Handling Department and Setting up an Intelligence Command Center” “公安部内设机构大调整：多部门整合做强办案部门，设情报指挥中心,” *Sohu News*, May 13, 2019, https://www.sohu.com/a/313683203_161795. Read on September 28.

Ministry of Public Security		
<u>Offices and Centers</u>	<u>Bureau Level Agencies</u>	<u>Other Groups</u>
General Office of MPS	Press and Propaganda Bureau	First Research Institute
Discipline Inspection and Services Team	First Bureau of MPS	Third Research Institute
National Immigration Administration	MPS Public Security Administration Bureau	People's Public Security Newspaper
Physical Evidence Appraisal Center	Counter Terrorism Bureau	People's Public Security University
Intelligence Command Center	Food and Drug Crime Bureau	People's Police University
Inspection Office of MPS	Cyber Security Bureau	Nanjing Forest Police College
	Narcotics Control Bureau	China Criminal Police College
	Economic Crime Investigation Bureau	Railway Police College
	Fourth Bureau of MPS	China People's Public Security Publishing
	Criminal Investigation Bureau	Golden Shield Film and TV Cultural Center
	Railway Public Security Bureau	
	Public Security Technical Reconnaissance Bureau	

	Public Security Bureau of the Civil Aviation Administration	
	International Cooperation Bureau	
	Legal Affairs Bureau	
	Prison Management Bureau	
	Transportation Management Bureau	
	Inspection and Audit Bureau	
	Police Security Bureau	
	Science and Technology Information Bureau	
	Personnel Training Bureau	
	Secret Service Bureau	
	Equipment and Finance Bureau	

Table 1 - New Organizational Structure of MPS²⁸

MPS's continued focus on traditional policing is evident throughout the restructuring; Criminal Investigation, Narcotics, and Economic Crimes all receive their own bureaus, while the Physical Evidence Appraisal Center sits at the Office/Center level. Newer crime control efforts reflect state priorities in the areas of Cyber Security, Counter Terrorism, Food and Drug Crimes, and Public Security Technical Reconnaissance, all of which are represented at the bureau level. Other entities give insight in the range of responsibilities covered by MPS: Prison

²⁸ "Responsibilities of the Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China" "中华人民共和国公安部部门职责" https://www.gov.cn/fuwu/2014-02/22/content_2618656.htm. Read on September 29, 2023.

Management, Personnel Training, Civil Aviation, Transportation Management, and Secret Service are all covered. The Ministry also maintains an Intelligence Command Center, a Police Security Bureau, and a newly integrated Press and Propaganda Bureau.

Interestingly, the restructuring recognizes entities that were not previously listed, despite long standing affiliations. These “other group” organizations include the People’s Public Security Newspapers, key police colleges and public security universities around the country, as well as the China People’s Public Security Publishing Association and the Golden Shield Film and TV Cultural Center.

Centralization

MPS’s control over policing in China is centralized by design, with a few key exceptions. Centralization is one of the core features of authoritarian states everywhere,²⁹ and centralized security bureaucracies in particular provide many advantages to leaders of single party states.³⁰ Streamlined policing systems, for example, are better equipped to communicate ground-level issues to central leaders and are also more likely to ensure uniformity of policy implementation during times of crisis.

Institutionally, the National People’s Congress sets general policies and legal priorities that are then used by MPS officials – under the guidance of superiors at the State Council – to devise more specific laws and regulations that the local police follow. Organizationally, scholars traditionally characterize the Chinese bureaucratic system as a loosely centralized entity composed of five distinct layers: central, provincial, city, county, and village. MPS is comprised of ministry officials at the central and provincial levels who then supervise public security bureaus (PSBs) and stations (*paichusuo*) at the city and county levels. In China, police do not maintain a dedicated presence at the village level. Instead, policing matters for the majority of villages are covered by the county and sometimes city stations on an as needed basis. The size of these stations can vary dramatically, and in some areas may be severely under-resourced and understaffed.³¹

²⁹ Linz, Juan José, 2000. *Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

³⁰ Bayley, David H. *Patterns of policing: A Comparative International Analysis*. Rutgers University Press, 1985.

³¹ Scoggins 2021, p 54.

To ensure compliance, police leaders up and down the bureaucracy are required to adhere to reporting requirements and meet specific targets set by MPS. The ministry also oversees training programs for ministerial and local level police, and ministry officials may periodically make trips to the lower levels to measure operational compliance. Supervision checkpoints have been created at all levels to monitor police behavior and compliance, but in practice, supervision is expensive and labor intensive. Even provincial level ministry officials only have the resources to follow important cases or issues.³²

Centralization is thus weakened by the sheer size of the government's jurisdiction as well as workforce considerations that limit the state's capacity to control decision making and enforcement on the ground. Significantly, policing is often spotty at the lowest levels of governance due to low personnel numbers.³³ County *paichusuos*, for example, might only have five officers to manage a large caseload, forcing them to work twenty-four and even thirty-six-hour shifts. Moreover, police at the city and county levels are beholden to their local governments, with some police referring to this relationship as having two bosses.³⁴ These local governments have considerable control over police administration and management issues, including budget and personnel decisions. In worse case scenarios, this dual leadership structure with local governments and MPS can make police accountable to two different authorities with competing expectations.³⁵ This relationship can also lead local governments to lean on police to do "dirty work" that is outside of their official job duties, such as stopping petitions or assisting in land demolitions.³⁶ Figure 2 presents a visualization of the dual control structure.

³² Scoggins 2022, p 73-5.

³³ Scoggins 2021, p. 57-8.

³⁴ Scoggins 2021.

³⁵ Scoggins 2021, Chapter 4.

³⁶ Zheng Chen. "Measuring Police Role Orientations in China: An Exploratory Study." *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* 44 (2016): 43-67.

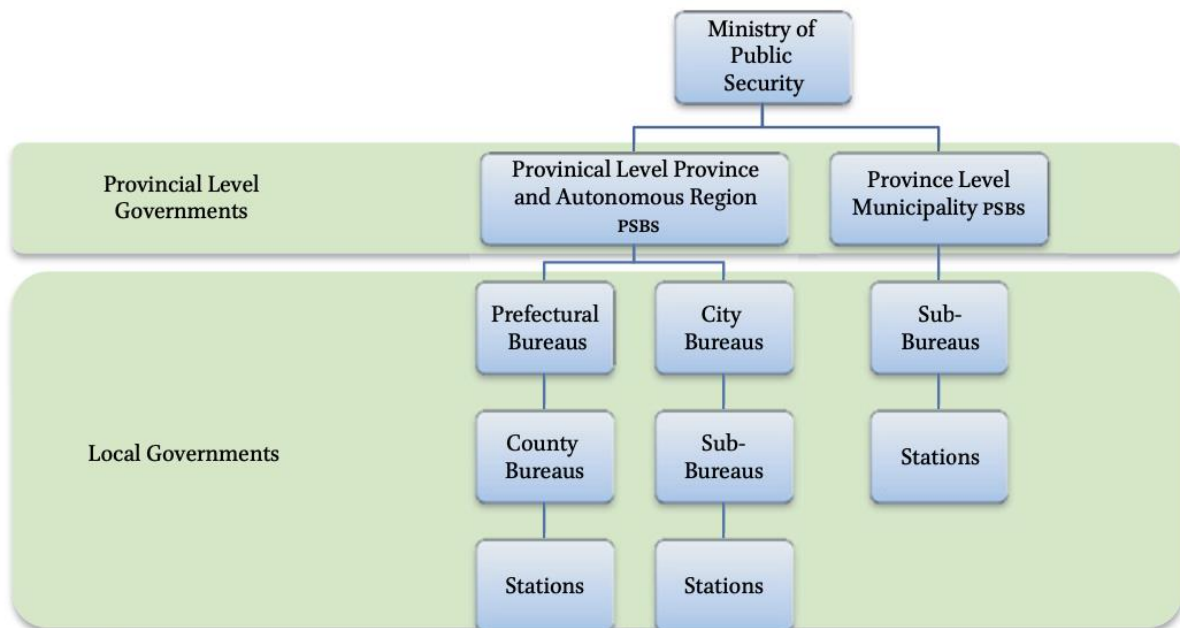


Figure 2 - Dual Control Structure³⁷

Functions of the Chinese Police

Beyond the organization and degree of centralization for policing in China, the functions of the police in China are also quite diversified, as evidenced by Table 1. At their core, MPS and all Chinese public security organs are charged with serving the Communist Party and the public.

According to the central government website,³⁸ specific responsibilities include:

- Prevent, stop, and investigate illegal and criminal activities.
- Prevent and combat terrorist activities.
- Maintain social order and stop behaviors that endanger social order.
- Manage traffic, fire protection, and dangerous goods.
- Manage household registration, resident ID Card, nationality as well as entry, status, and exit of Chinese foreign nationals.
- Maintain border security.

³⁷ A version of this figure previously appeared in Scoggins 2018.

³⁸ “Ministry of Public Security of the People’s Republic of China” “中华人民共和国公安部,” <https://www.gov.cn/bumenfuwu/mps.htm>. Read on October 2, 2023. See also http://english.www.gov.cn/state_council/2014/09/09/content_281474986284154.htm.

- Protect persons, venues, and facilities as designated by the state.
- Manage gatherings, parades, and demonstrations.
- Supervise public information networks.
- Supervise security concerning state organizations, social organizations, enterprises, institutions, and large construction sites.
- Guide community security commissions.

Stability Maintenance

For the purposes of this report, two areas of policing warrant special consideration: stability maintenance and counterterrorism. First and foremost is the primacy of stability maintenance or *weiwen* for policing duties. Although the bulk of police activities at the local level involve addressing traditional crime, concerns over stability maintenance, when they arise, take precedence over all other police work.³⁹ The roots of stability maintenance can be traced back to the 1989 June Fourth movement, more commonly referred to as the Tiananmen Square protests. Mindful that another similarly sized uprising could unseat CCP rule, central government leaders directed police and military officials to develop a more unified approach to dealing with social unrest, and the resulting new best practices were ultimately codified in the 1995 Police Law.⁴⁰ In 2005, President Hu Jintao's call for provincial and ministerial level cadres to build a "socialist harmonious society" further intensified a national level movement. Cadre evaluation systems were modified, and government leaders could now be demoted or fired if they failed to "maintain public order."⁴¹ With their jobs on the line, local leaders in turn put pressure on their police forces to deal swiftly with protests.

Stability maintenance is best described as work to control social unrest and ensure stability. In practice, this entails a broad range of activities, including responding to protests, riots and other public displays of dissent as well as managing petitioners and monitoring dissidents. Police are often the first responders for acts of dissent, but when a situation becomes too large or violent, local leaders have the option to call in the People's Armed Police, a paramilitary force discussed in the next section. As such, local police forces under the Ministry of Public Security do not handle large scale riots, but they deal with nearly everything else, including small displays of dissent (*shangfang*) that may only involve a small group or even a single

³⁹ Scoggins 2021.

⁴⁰ Excerpts from this paragraph previously appeared in Scoggins 2021.

⁴¹ Yue Xie. "The Political Logic of Weiwen in Contemporary China." *Issues & Studies* 48, no. 3 (2012).

individual. When responding to protests and other smaller acts of dissent, officers are under specific instructions to clear public areas such as roadways and public squares quickly and with as little conflict as possible.⁴² The officers are then expected to transport the dissatisfied party to relevant government offices, which sometimes involves a process of negotiation, repression, detention or even cash payouts to the protestors.⁴³

Stability maintenance has evolved well beyond protest event control, and police officers are also expected to manage petitioners and dissidents through preventative means. This can entail physically detaining them for a few days or weeks during sensitive times such as national leadership meetings, but it can also take the form of long-term detention or house arrest for individuals who are frequent petitioners or who make political claims.⁴⁴ At other times, local government leaders and police may work together to persuade the relatives or friends of an aggrieved individual or group to drop claims or otherwise cease and desist from activities deemed a threat to stability.⁴⁵

One additional concern for frontline police and local government leaders is the tendency of protestors or dissidents to “skip levels” by taking their case or complaints to a higher authority. For example, an aggrieved individual in city X might head to a provincial capital or even Beijing to voice their claim. Under the cadre evaluation system this behavior can cause trouble for local government and police leaders if it happens too frequently. As such, local governments devote cash and human resources to prevent key individuals from leaving the city or secure their return before they draw the attention of higher ups. Sometimes this work is carried out by auxiliary police (discussed below), but official police officers are also dispatched for these duties.⁴⁶

Since surveillance can help with this type of work, concerns over stability maintenance are driving government investment in physical surveillance cameras, facial recognition software, and information databases. Local and national databases have long given officers and anyone

⁴² Scoggins 2021, 84.

⁴³ Typically, these payouts are funding by local governments.

⁴⁴ Scoggins 2021, 62.

⁴⁵ Yanhua Deng and Kevin J. O'Brien. "Relational Repression in China: Using Social Ties to Demobilize Protesters." *The China Quarterly* 215 (2013): 533-552.

⁴⁶ Scoggins 2021, 62.

else with access the ability to track hotel stays, train and air travel, and even internet usage for persons of interest. Advances in artificial technology have now further improved the ability of police to monitor and track protestors, dissidents, and more run-of-the-mill suspects. Cameras are commonplace in all major cities, dotting the landscape at transportation centers, street corners, and the interiors of key buildings. Police leaders have openly touted the abilities of cameras and facial recognition software to track down suspects,⁴⁷ although the technologies used and therefore the effectiveness of the capabilities can vary from province to province.⁴⁸ Stability maintenance work has nevertheless increased and improved as police are better equipped to monitor a person's whereabouts and movements and identify suspects after a major event or protest.

Most recently, police leaders are investing in preventative crime systems that can be used for stability maintenance work or more general crime control. While data on these systems is limited, the goal is to create automated systems that send alerts to police when persons of interest behave suspiciously, such as gathering in the same hotel or buying a train ticket to Beijing.⁴⁹ Government procurement requests collected by researchers at ChinaFile show that multiple police entities in China are seeking to buy security camera networks and software that creates algorithms that will further assist in stability maintenance work and crime control.⁵⁰ Much less is known about the effectiveness or degree of application of these systems.

Counterterrorism

As stability maintenance work has grown, so has the government's related focus on counterterrorism efforts. Just like stability maintenance, counterterrorism takes precedence over other types of police work, even though it does not occupy the bulk of police officer time in most parts of the country. In a few notable areas such as Xinjiang, however,

⁴⁷ "In Your Face: China's All-Seeing State," *BBC*, December 10, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-china-42248056>. Read on October 15, 2023.

⁴⁸ Scoggins 2021, 129.

⁴⁹ Paul Mozur, Muye Xiao, and John Liu, "'An Invisible Cage': How China is Policing the Future," *The New York Times*, June 25, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/25/technology/china-surveillance-police.html>. Read on October 15, 2023.

⁵⁰ Jessica Batke and Mareike Ohlberg, "State of Surveillance," *ChinaFile*, October 30, 2020, <https://www.chinafile.com/state-surveillance-china>. Read on December 15, 2023.

counterterrorism efforts are baked into the daily operations of police as officers collect information on residents and manage traditional types of crime.

Since the early 1990s, government officials have voiced concerns about “three evil forces” of terrorism, separatism, and extremism in Xinjiang.⁵¹ Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Uyghur separatists were repeatedly labeled as terrorists by the Chinese state.⁵² Events such as the killing of 16 border police officers in 2008 when two Uyghur men drove a dump truck into a group of jogging officers and threw an explosive device at the security team’s station⁵³ or the 2014 train station attacks in Kunming Province that left 31 people dead⁵⁴ are often cited by state media to further justify this concern. Careful scholarly analysis of government documents finds that the government’s security strategy in Xinjiang is rooted in internal language of counterterrorism and efforts to inoculate China’s Muslim population from “infection” by extremist networks.⁵⁵ These and other concerns have led government officials to ramp up counterterrorism efforts in Xinjiang and elsewhere. Most notably, this includes the detention of somewhere between one and three million Uyghur, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz minority group members in what the state refers to as re-education and work training camps. Counterterrorism efforts and similar strategies of control and detention are also employed in the neighboring province of Tibet, which is home to a different religious minority group – Tibetan Buddhists – and has been a target of security concern for the Chinese government since the 1950s.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Myunghee Lee, and Emir Yazici. "Counterterrorism and Preventive Repression: China's Changing Strategy in Xinjiang." *International Security* 44, no. 3 (2019): 9-47.

⁵² Chien-peng Cheng, “China’s ‘War on Terror’: September 11 and Uighur Separatism,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 1, 2002, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2002-07-01/chinas-war-terror-september-11-and-uighur-separatism>. Read on December 14, 2023.

⁵³ Mark Magnier, “Uighurs are Blamed in Deadly Attack in China,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 2008. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2008-aug-05-fg-china5-story.html>. Read on December 14, 2023.

⁵⁴ Hannah Beech, “Deadly Terrorist Attack in Southwestern China Blamed on Separatist Muslim Uighurs,” *Time*, March 1, 2014, <https://time.com/11687/deadly-terror-attack-in-southwestern-china-blamed-on-separatist-muslim-uighurs/>. Read on December 14, 2014.

⁵⁵ Grietens et al. 2019.

⁵⁶ Research is limited, but counterterrorism language appears less frequently in documents about Tibet in comparison to Xinjiang. Many of the policing methods of surveillance and control nevertheless share broad similarities.

While there are barriers to research on Xinjiang and related counterterrorism efforts, we do know government leaders place a high priority on counterterrorism and general policing efforts in the province. The result is an increasingly coordinated group of strategies involving multiple government agencies whose duties frequently intersect and overlap. For MPS, this has meant providing extra training and support for local police officers and even recruiting Uyghur officers to serve on the force.⁵⁷ It also entails heavy coordination with special security forces such as the People’s Armed Police (PAP) and the People’s Liberation Army. As such, local police officers have worked alongside PAP and PLA officers to gather information, respond to threats and attacks, and track individuals of interest. These collaborations have been in place for nearly two decades, pre-dating the mass detentions and ramping up over the last 10 years as more resources were devoted to the region.⁵⁸ Most recently, provincial ministries have also begun regularly sending teams to Xinjiang to conduct investigations and provide general support to ground forces engaged in stability maintenance and counterterrorism work.⁵⁹

Because of the intense security focus on Xinjiang, it has also become ground zero for experimentation of new policing methods. Many of the highest tech camera and surveillance systems that we now see elsewhere were first employed in Xinjiang and Tibet to monitor checkpoints and collect detailed information about residents.⁶⁰ Beyond surveillance systems, other new practices include the placement of small police kiosks at key city intersections and the related grid management system, which divides cities into smaller units that are overseen by human grid managers who are trained to read surveillance data and marshal local resources as needed.⁶¹ Although the grid management system was first developed in 2011 in Tibet, it was quickly adopted in Xinjiang and has spread to other parts of China where the

⁵⁷ Scoggins 2021, p. 61.

⁵⁸ Greitens et. al 2019.

⁵⁹ Author interview with government official, 2019.

⁶⁰ Chris Buckley and Paul Mozur, “How China Uses High Tech Surveillance to Subdue Minorities,” *The New York Times*, May 22, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/22/world/asia/china-surveillance-xinjiang.html>. Read on December 15, 2023.

⁶¹ “Grid Based Management,” *China Media Project*, April 16, 2021. https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/grid-based-management/. Read on October 15, 2023.

focus may be less on counterterrorism and more on general stability maintenance work or crime control.

Other Security Entities within Public Security

Before moving beyond the Ministry of Public Security to discuss other security agencies in China, two additional police entities deserve mention: the Domestic Security Department and auxiliary police. The former deals directly with stability maintenance at the ground-level and enjoys highest priority among police wherever they operate. The latter constitutes the bottom rung of policing; low paid contract workers who can be hired and fired at a moment's notice. Both serve essential functions that enable daily police operations in China.

Domestic Security Department

The Domestic Security Department (DSD) or *guobao* 国保 is a specialized division within MPS that manages domestic security concerns. It maintains departments all the way down to the municipal level and is charged with protecting and strengthening the rule of the Chinese Communist Party, which includes intelligence collection, political dissident control, and response to activities deemed subversive to the regime. The DSD is one of the most secretive branches within the ministry due to the politically sensitive nature of its work, and most of what we know comes from leaked documents or reports from dissidents who have been monitored or detained by the DSD. From an organizational standpoint, DSDs occupy a relatively privileged place within the police bureaucracy since their work is considered a cornerstone of stability maintenance. Because the DSD enjoys a high priority in MPS and remains separate from other police forces, the local police are thus subordinate to the DSD and expected to assist when needed.⁶²

Notably, two collections of essays penned by individuals who were detained by either the DSD or the Ministry of State Security (MSS) were published in the 2010s.⁶³ Both accounts provide details into the tactics used by officers during detention as well as the coordination efforts between local police, the DSD, and MSS to monitor, apprehend, hold, and release

⁶² Scoggins 2022, p 32.

⁶³ Xu Youyu and Hua Ze, eds. *In the Shadow of the Rising Dragon: Stories of Repression in the New China*. Macmillan, 2013; Caster, Michael, and Teng Biao. *The People's Republic of the Disappeared: Stories from Inside China's System for Enforced Disappearances*. Safeguard Defenders, 2017.

individuals suspected of crimes against the state. In such high profile and relatively rare detentions, the degree of coordination among agencies and departments appears to be carefully orchestrated. Detainees have described repeated interactions with one agency, such as the DSD, only to be physically detained by local police officers and then later questioned by representatives from all groups, including MSS while in detention. More recently, a suicide note posted by Li Liqun, a liberal political commentator who wrote under the pen name Li Huizhi, also provided information about the degree of surveillance and intimidation he experienced from local DSD officers, including the existence of special designations such as “ministerial-level” surveillance classifications.⁶⁴

Internal documents from the DSD have also surfaced that provide insight into specific priorities and activities. In a group of documents made available online by *China Digital Times*, we find confirmation that the department’s chief priority is to protect social and political stability.⁶⁵ One of the documents also notes a “large interview program” run by a DSD division within a local public security bureau somewhere in Yunnan province that managed a variety of security concerns involving migrant workers, land disputes, and environmental pollution by creating early warning systems. Another document in this leak described the creation of a DSD division within the Wenshan County PSB in 2009 and included details about staff numbers, training, and efforts to collect intelligence and recruit informants. Moreover, a different leaked document from the Zhejiang provincial public security bureau confirms the existence of a DSD list of “critical persons” and details police protocols for controlling movements of different types of persons such as Falun gong members, petitioners, rights defenders, drug traffickers, and persons who have committed serious crimes in the past.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Anne Henochowicz, “Translation: ‘The Country has Gone Dark.’ Li Huizhi’s Last Words.” *China Digital Times*, 29 July 2021, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2021/07/translation-the-country-has-gone-dark-li-huizhis-last-words/>

⁶⁵ Xiao Qiang, “Domestic Security Department: Eliminating Hot Button Issues on a Local Level (Part 1 of 2),” *China Digital Times*, 20 April 2010, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2010/04/domestic-security-department-eliminating-hot-button-issues-on-a-local-level/>

⁶⁶ Xiao Qiang, “Zhejiang Police’s Internal Document: Controlling the Movements of Critical Persons,” *China Digital Times*, 19 January 2011, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/01/zhejiang-psb-internal-document-controlling-the-movements-of-critical-persons/>. Read on October 12, 2023.

Additional leaked documents describe specific efforts to manage “evil cults”,⁶⁷ recruit informants from university students and teachers,⁶⁸ and compensate informants.⁶⁹ Notably, nearly all of the leaked documents detail activities of local DSDs within cities and towns across China. Cumulatively, they reveal information about both the nature of DSD activities and the extent of DSD involvement at the local levels. With regard to the overseas police stations, we do not know if the DSD ever operates outside of China, but certain overseas activities of concern such as dissident management and informant recruitment do fall squarely under the purview of the DSD.

Auxiliary Police

Beyond official police and DSD officers, there are several frontline workers in security roles who wear similar uniforms and even perform overlapping duties but who are not considered official police (*minjing*). Auxiliary police work with official police at the city and some county levels and carry the name of *xiejing*, *fujing*, or *xiefujing*. These assistant or supplemental officers often work alongside official police or in their stead.

The nature of auxiliary police duties can vary greatly, depending on the city and hiring justification. Some auxiliary police are the hired “thugs” who have received media and scholarly attention for monitoring, harassing, and even physically assaulting dissidents,⁷⁰ but many other auxiliary police perform mundane functions such as managing pedestrians at busy intersections or manning the small police kiosks that dot the landscape of many Chinese

⁶⁷ Xiao Qiang. “Domestic Security Department: Eliminating Hot Button Issues on a Local Level (Part 2 of 2),” *China Digital Times*, 21 April 2010, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2010/04/domestic-security-department-eliminating-hot-button-issues-on-a-local-level-part-2-of-2/>. Read on October 12, 2023.

⁶⁸ Xiao Qiang. “DSD Police Recruit and Maintain Informant Networks Among University Students,” *China Digital Times*, 11 April 2010, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2010/04/dsd-police-recruit-and-maintain-informant-networks-among-university-students/>. Read on October 12, 2023.

⁶⁹ Xiao Qiang. “New Details of Chinese Secret Police Local Informants Paying System Revealed,” *China Digital Times*, 23 February 2010. <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2010/02/new-details-of-chinese-secret-police-local-informants-paying-system-revealed/>. Read on October 12, 2023.

⁷⁰ Lynette H. Ong. ““Thugs-for-Hire”: Subcontracting of state coercion and state capacity in China.” *Perspectives on Politics* 16, no. 3 (2018): 680-695.

cities. Auxiliary police often wear the same uniforms as official police, although in some cities the auxiliary designation is visible on the sleeve or front breast pocket.

Cities hire and release auxiliary police as needed to make up for low per capita police numbers, especially during specific times of need. Most are paid significantly less than official police. Our research team could find no reports of auxiliary police operating overseas, which is likely due to their low level of training and status within the organization.

5. Other Security Entities

Beyond the Ministry of Public Security, several other security related entities exist that also manage security, crime, protest, and public order. The most powerful of these are the Ministry of State Security, the National Security Commission, and the People's Armed Police. When a policing issue involves any of these entities, the police would be expected to cooperate with all relevant requests and would be subordinate to these authorities. The least powerful of these entities is the *chengguan*, a local enforcement agency that sits below the public security organs and sometimes performs overlapping functions.

Ministry of State Security

The Ministry of State Security (MSS) oversees a separate and distinct security agency also known as the the national security bureau (*guoanju*). State security agents are charged with protecting state security, focusing primarily on national level or external threats. This necessitates some overlap with the mission of the DSD and, as noted earlier, accounts from dissidents indicate that the two agencies sometimes work together to detain and communicate with persons of interest, but in general, the DSD is focused more squarely on identifying and eliminating domestic threats at the ground level.

Unsurprisingly, the Chinese government seldom makes information about the MSS public. However, as with DSD activities, online reports occasionally surface about domestic compensation systems and rewards for tips from the general public that support and assist

MSS national security work.⁷¹ Internationally, the case of former MSS officer Xu Yanjun⁷² and US based accomplice, Ji Chaoqun,⁷³ also provides insight into the inner workings of MSS. After a protracted investigation by the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) and the multinational corporation, General Electric (G.E.), Xu and Ji were found guilty of attempting to obtain proprietary science and technology secrets from US companies. This unprecedented case, which involved luring Xu to Belgium and coordinating extradition with the Belgium government and Belgian Federal Police, provides some of the most detailed information yet about how MSS agents and informants make contact with Chinese-born persons living and working in the United States. In Ji's case, he was first contacted by a Chinese university to give an invited talk, and during this visit he was befriended by Xu, who made promises of similar such engagements and would eventually offered Ji payments in exchange for transferring information about proprietary technology at G.E.⁷⁴ As with the DSD, there is no current evidence at the time of writing to suggest the involvement of MSS in overseas police stations.

National Security Commission

⁷¹ Alexander Boyd, "Ministry of State Security Offers Big Rewards for National Security Tips," *China Digital Times*, 10 June 2022, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2022/06/ministry-of-state-security-offers-big-rewards-for-national-security-tips/>. Read on October 12, 2023.

⁷² United States Attorney's Office, Southern District of Ohio, "Chinese Government Intelligence Officer Sentenced to 20 Years in Prison for Espionage Crimes, Attempting to Steal Trade Secrets from Cincinnati Company," US Department of Justice, 16 November 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdoh/pr/chinese-government-intelligence-officer-sentenced-20-years-prison-espionage-crimes>. Read on September 15, 2023.

⁷³ United States Attorney's Office, Northern District of Illinois, "Chinese National Convicted of Acting Within the United States as an Unregistered Agent of the People's Republic of China," U.S. Department of Justice, 26 September 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndil/pr/chinese-national-convicted-acting-within-united-states-unregistered-agent-people-s>. Read on September 15, 2023.

⁷⁴ Xu was captured after inviting a G.E. Aviation employee and Chinese national to give a talk at Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics. After the F.B.I. informed G.E. of the talk, which had not been approved by the company, the employee agreed to cooperate with the F.B.I. in the investigation. The full story of the lengthy process is detailed in a New York Times Magazine article and podcast. Yudhijit Bhattacharjee, "The Daring Ruse that Exposed China's Campaign to Steal American Secrets," *The New York Times Magazine*, 7 March 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/07/magazine/china-spying-intellectual-property.html>. Read on September 10, 2023.

China established a National Security Commission (CNSC) in 2014 with the goal of solidifying China's previously fragmented approach to addressing terrorism and further consolidate President Xi Jinping's control over the issue.⁷⁵ Scholar Michael Clarke calls the move an "instrumentalization of terrorism" that identifies 11 broad areas of focus, including political, homeland, and ecological security.⁷⁶ CNSC is essentially an umbrella organization that is governed by the Central Committee of the CCP. The agency's three primary tasks are to advise central government leaders on matters of security and strategy, carry out strategic coordination, and to conduct crisis and risk management for internal and external security threats.⁷⁷ As the coordinating body for counterterrorism efforts, all relevant agencies, including the MPS are expected to aid and assist CNSC activities whenever relevant.

Many Western analysts see the establishment of the CNSC as another bold move on the part of Xi Jinping to attempt to take personal control over key security threats.⁷⁸ Xi chaired the first meeting in April 2014, introducing the agency as a "holistic national security concept."⁷⁹ Shortly following the establishment of the CNSC, the first counter-terrorism legislation was passed in December 2015. This legislation formalized counterterrorism as a national security priority⁸⁰ and provided a legal basis for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and People's Armed Police (PAP) to identify and suppress counterterrorism. This move essentially codified wide latitude for PLA and PAP forces to engage in counterterrorism efforts throughout the country.

While many key details about the agency, such as its full membership and internal structure, are still not publicly available, we do know that a broader set of national security commissions

⁷⁵ Lampton, David M. "Xi Jinping and the National Security Commission: policy coordination and political power." In *The Making of China's Foreign Policy in the 21st century*, pp. 98-116. Routledge, 2018.

⁷⁶ Clarke, Michael, ed. *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in China: Domestic and Foreign Policy dimensions*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

⁷⁷ Kejin Zhao, "China's National Security Commission," *Window into China* series of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 14, 2015.

⁷⁸ Lampton 2018.

⁷⁹ "The First Meeting of the China National Security Commission was held and Xi Jinping Delivered an Important Speech," April 15, 2015. https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2014-04/15/content_2659641.htm. Read on December 15, 2023.

⁸⁰ For a translation of the Counter Terrorism Law and its 2018 amendment in English, see <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/counter-terrorism-law-2015/>.

have been established by CCP committees at the provincial, city and even county levels.⁸¹ These lower level NSCS are led by local party secretaries, and some reports indicate that they meet several times a year and discuss issues of national security that entail a broad range of topics, including food security and public health.

People's Armed Police

Another security force that works closely with the police is the People's Armed Police (PAP). Up until January 1, 2018, the PAP was governed jointly by the Ministry of Public Security and the People's Liberation Army, but since that date, it has been fully under the command of the PLA and Xi Jinping in his role as the chairman of the Central Military Commission. This move was made just two months before constitutional revisions requiring presidential term limits were abolished. It thus further consolidated Xi Jinping's control over all armed forces. The PAP itself is a paramilitary force composed of up to 1.5 million men and women. It is best known for protest riot control, but PAP officers also work on counterterrorism as well as protect borders, national forests, and state-owned gold mines.

Because many of China's domestic police do not regularly carry guns and lack adequate firearm training, the PAP is often called in to handle violent situations that are both large and small in scale. PAP divisions are stationed strategically around the country, and squads of up to 500 officers are ready to deploy when a violent protest or other altercation erupts.⁸² Because the PAP are specially trained to confront violent suspects as well as protestors, some local stations will also request assistance from nearby PAP divisions in special cases. Nevertheless, the PAP is no longer the first line of defense for local stations, since calling in the PAP creates a record of social unrest that might disadvantage local stations and government leaders under the cadre evaluation system.

Internationally, sometimes the PAP have been involved in international training exercises and other forms of state-to-state cooperation. One report from 2016, for example, identified three training exercises for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) that were led by the

⁸¹ Joel Wuthrow, "Transforming China's National Security Architecture in the Xi Era," Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on "CCP Decision-Making and the 20th Party Congress," January 27, 2022. *Institute for National Strategic Studies*.

⁸² Scoggins 2021.

PAP.⁸³ Another report from 2019 noted training exercises between the PAP and the Russian National Guard.⁸⁴

Chengguan

City Urban Administrative Law Enforcement Bureaus also maintain a security force known in Chinese as the *chengguan* that is frequently confused with police due to similarities in uniforms and functions. *Chengguan* are not civil servants, but they are city employees who perform a variety of public safety functions. In particular, they are charged with “street-cleaning,” which can entail fining and removing unlicensed street vendors, cleaning up illegal commercial notices, and reporting other suspicious or undesirable activity. They may also perform patrols in public spaces.

Sometimes these interactions turn adversarial and even violent. While cities are taking efforts to better train and monitor the *chengguan*, reports of violence confrontation continue to surface.⁸⁵ *Chengguan* are a domestic security force that falls a step below the police and not every city in China maintains a *chengguan* bureau. There have been no reports of *chengguan* operating internationally, and due to the nature of their functions and their lower overall status, it is not likely that they will ever have an overseas presence.

Security Entities in Perspective

As sections four and five indicate, China has developed a broad and comprehensive system of policing and security that aims to address a wide variety of crime and concerns. As a result, some agencies engage in overlapping functions and careful coordination is necessary so that various groups do not duplicate efforts or let key issues slip through the cracks. Moreover, the

⁸³ Bonnie Girard, “How China Uses the People’s Armed Police as Agents of Diplomacy,” *The Diplomat*, November 20, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/how-china-uses-the-peoples-armed-police-as-agents-of-diplomacy/>. Read on October 15, 2023.

⁸⁴ Panyue Huang, “China-Russia ‘Cooperation-2019’ Joint Counter-Terrorism Exercise Kicks Off,” *China Military Online*, October 12, 2019, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/9649625.html. Read on December 15, 2023.

⁸⁵ Alexander Boyd, “Sichuan Crowd Turns Tables on Notorious ‘Chengguan’ Urban Enforcers,” *China Digital Times*, June 14, 2023, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2023/06/sichuan-crowd-turns-tables-on-notorious-chengguan/>, Read on September 22, 2023.

state's overarching priority of stability is present across all agencies, harkening back to the historical roots of mandates to serve CCP objectives. Whereas police were agents of the mass line during the Mao Era, security officials across the board are now agents of stability and security, whether they are police officers engaged in street-level efforts to manage petitioners or highly trained PAP officers responding to a terrorist threat. In China, there are few lines between regular police work of managing crime, or what scholars have termed "low policing," and political police work like stability maintenance, or "high policing."⁸⁶ Due to the nation's perpetual focus on the political per the mandate of the highest levels, policing is often political.

Figure 3 visualizes how the relevant security organizations are governed at the national level of China's party-state structure. The State Council is the government entity that oversees all ministries, including the MSS and MPS. The Central Military Commission is under the direct, executive purview of President Xi Jinping and manages the People's Armed Police, and the National Security Commission falls under the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Not listed are local government entities of auxiliary police and *chengguan*.

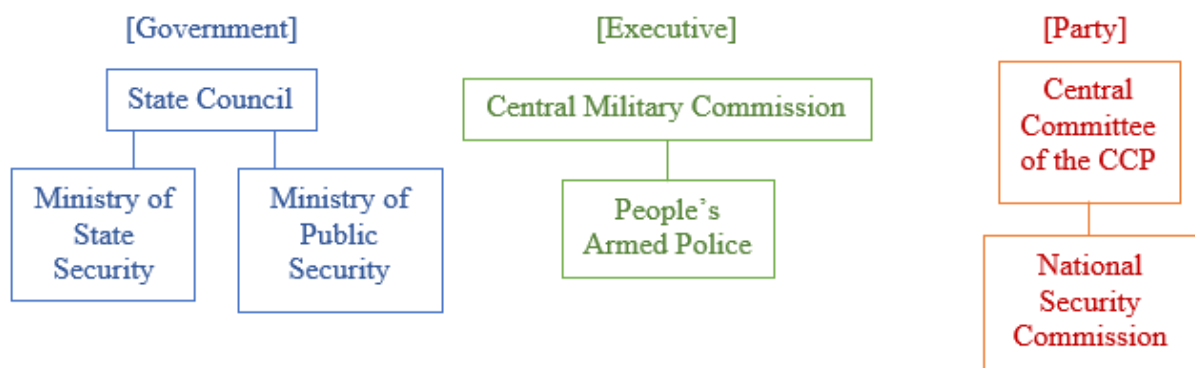


Figure 3 - Command Structure of Chinese Security Organizations at the National Level

⁸⁶ Brodeur, Jean-Paul. The Policing Web. 2010.

6. Organization of Chinese Police Involvement Abroad

Consistent with President Xi Jinping's more internationally focused agenda, the last decade has seen an increase in Chinese police activities and interactions abroad. With substantial economic interests overseas, growing concern over corruption outflows and other transnational crimes, and over 10 million Chinese nationals living outside of China,⁸⁷ Chinese policing authorities have many reasons to build and maintain international connections. Remarks from the National Public Security International Cooperation Working Conference held in Beijing in 2017 provide insight into the broad plan for overseas involvement. The focus of the meeting was to "strengthen and improve international law enforcement and security cooperation" to combat transnational crime. At the meeting, police leaders called on public security forces at all levels to be guided by Xi Jinping's national security concept and actively participate in global security governance.⁸⁸

In practice, China's international police engagements are guided both by the MPS International Cooperation Bureau and other relevant authorities. This entails both bilateral and multilateral police cooperation. Furthermore, there is sometimes overlap between police and military officials, depending on the issue and level of engagement, particularly when the actions involve multilateral organizations.

Ministry of Public Security International Cooperation Bureau

Within MPS, the International Cooperation Bureau is a bureau level division and the main entity charged with developing international activities. Its current director is Hu Binchen. In a wide ranging 2017 interview, the bureau's former director Liao Jintong confirmed the growing importance of the office, its goals of communicating regularly with foreign law

⁸⁷ Zhuang Guotu, "The Overseas Chinese: A Long History," *UNESCO Courier*, April, 2021, <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2021-4/overseas-chinese-long-history>. Read on October 2, 2023.

⁸⁸ "National Public Security International Cooperation Working Conference Held In Beijing" "全国公安国际合作工作会议在京召开," *Xinhua*, February 2, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-02/07/c_1120426453.htm. Read on October 2, 2023.

enforcement agencies, and ministry concerns about a wide variety of transnational crimes.⁸⁹ Liao's interview provided valuable information about the extent of engagement abroad, noting that MPS had a "close law enforcement cooperation relationship with 113 countries, had established 129 bilateral and multilateral cooperation mechanisms and 96 contact hotlines, and had signed various cooperation documents with the internal affairs in police departments of more than 60 countries."⁹⁰

In 2017, Liao stressed the bureau's role in protecting national interests and fighting criminal activities.⁹¹ He noted that China has always adhered to zero tolerance for all kinds of transnational crime involving China, saying the bureau would "extend the reach of international cooperation and special crackdowns" wherever activities involving China spread. He went on to describe the relevant criminal activities addressed by the bureau, including, "drug trafficking, telecommunications fraud, cybercrime, gun smuggling, illegal immigration, human trafficking, organized transnational prostitution, infringement of intellectual property rights, and production and trafficking of counterfeit goods.

Beyond official statements, publicly posted procurement notices also provide some insight into the activities of the bureau. One such posting invites companies to bid up to a budgeted amount of 681 million yuan for police supplies procurement in "country X."⁹² This announcement names the materials as "terminal laptops, all-in-one computers, network switches, UPS, VPN security gateways (branch), cabinets, and VPN security gateways (center)." Another procurement notice posted a year earlier for 2.4 million yuan only lists

⁸⁹ "Ping An Online Interview: Liao Jinrong, Director of the International Cooperation Bureau of the Ministry of Public Security" "平安中国网络访谈:公安部国际合作局局长廖进荣," *People's Public Security News*, March 21, 2017, <https://news.sina.cn/gn/2017-03-21/detail-ifycnpiu9267301.d.html>. Read on October 3, 2023.

⁹⁰ "Ping An Online Interview: Liao Jinrong."

⁹¹ "Ping An Online Interview: Liao Jinrong."

⁹² "Tender Announcement for the X Country Police Materials Procurement Project by the International Cooperation Bureau of the Ministry of Public Security" "公安部国际合作局 X 国警用物资采购项目招标公告," December 8, 2022. <https://zycg.gov.cn/freecms/site/zygjjzfcgzx/ggxx/info/2022/be9bf1ed-f267-47be-8ae8-1abd549038ff.html?id=6730ebd4-76ae-11ed-9548-fa163e9acaa1>.

“police materials.”⁹³ It is not clear from either of the notices, however, how such police materials would be used.

Bilateral Police Engagement

As in other areas of international engagement, China devotes considerable time and resources to developing bilateral ties. Bilateral security ties involve engagement across multiple bureaucracies and levels of government, but the description below focuses on police involvement.

Regionally speaking, most bilateral police outreach occurs in Asia. One recent analysis of bilateral police cooperation published by the Center for American Progress found that MPS officials (both retired and current) held 114 bilateral meetings with foreign counterparts between 1997 and 2021, with 60% of all events occurring while Xi Jinping was in power.⁹⁴ 60 percent of those exchanges occurred in Asia (mostly border countries), 13 percent in Europe, 10 percent in the respective regions of Africa and Latin America/the Caribbean, and 4 percent in North America. Additionally, the study identified two MPS bilateral exchanges in the Middle East and one in Oceania.

These bilateral ties resulted in 51 formal agreements, including 19 cooperation agreements, 13 memorandums of understanding, 11 cooperation documents, four protocols of cooperation, two letters of intent for cooperation, one readmission agreement, and one memorandum of cooperation.⁹⁵ The report notes that some of these agreements with countries such as Egypt have raised human rights concerns because 200 Uyghurs residing in the country were

⁹³ “Announcement on Solicitation of Opinions on the Police Materials Procurement Project of the International Cooperation Bureau of the Ministry of Public Security” “公安部国际合作局警用物资采购项目征求意见公告,” October 11, 2021, <https://zycg.gov.cn/freecms/site/zygjjgzfcgzx/ggxx/info/2021/0969b1873b0a9f7f6e17059e40804242-A.html>.

⁹⁴ Jordan Link, “The Expanding International Reach of China’s Police,” *Center for American Progress*, October 17, 2022, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-expanding-international-reach-of-chinas-police/>. Read on October 14, 2023.

⁹⁵ Link, “The Expanding International Reach.”

reportedly detained just two weeks after the Egyptian government announced a security cooperation agreement with MPS.⁹⁶

What are the issues of cooperative interest? Security and stability, unsurprisingly, is a top concern for bilateral police cooperation. Data on bilateral police meetings published by the Center for American Progress notes that stability maintenance was a common topic, with terms such as social stability, regional stability, national stability, and management of large-scale events (protests) mentioned in at least 41 of the 114 meetings with officials from 18 different countries.⁹⁷

Multilateral Police Engagement

On the multilateral cooperation front, China also says it actively participates in law enforcement cooperation under the Mekong River Basin Law Enforcement Security Cooperation Mechanism, a four nation joint patrol to protect the Mekong River from drug smuggling,⁹⁸ and security cooperation within the United Nations, INTERPOL, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and China-ASEAN regional cooperation.⁹⁹

Examples of all multilateral interactions are too numerous to list in full, but several recent international efforts stand out. Chinese police are particularly active in INTERPOL. Meng Hongwei, a career police leader in China served as the first Chinese president of INTERPOL between 2016 and 2018 until his tenure ended abruptly when he was detained in China and sentenced for corruption charges.¹⁰⁰ In 2021, Hu Binchen, another career MPS officer, was elected to the position, despite concerns lodged by an alliance of 20 countries regarding the

⁹⁶ Joshua Lipes, "'The Price of My Studies Abroad Was Very High': Uyghur Former Al Azhar University," *Radio Free Asia*, June 26, 2020. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/student-06262020141646.html>. Read on December 15, 2023.

⁹⁷ Link, "The Expanding International Reach."

⁹⁸ Liu Zhi, "Four Nation Joint Patrol Protects Mekong River," *China Daily*, December 18, 2021, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202112/18/WS61bd2a8aa310cdd39bc7c1cb.html>. Read on October 2, 2023.

⁹⁹ "Ping An Online Interview: Liao Jinrong."

¹⁰⁰ Colin Dwyer, "Former Interpol President Sentenced to Prison in China for Corruption," *NPR*, January 21, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/21/798121397/former-interpol-president-sentenced-to-prison-in-china-for-corruption>. Read on October 3, 2023.

repressive tactics of Chinese police and targeting of dissidents.¹⁰¹ China's use of "Red Notices," an electronic alert published by the INTERPOL General Secretariat to ask for help seeking the location of a wanted person, has also sparked some concern.¹⁰² Safeguard Defenders, the same NGO that released the report on overseas police service stations, found that China has used red notices in the past to target political dissidents living abroad, although the country no longer makes announcements of such notices public. Beyond this concerns voiced by a few groups, China's high degree of participation in INTERPOL appears to remain unchanged.

Chinese police are also active within relevant UN groups. China has become increasingly involved in UN Peacekeeping, sending thousands of PLA soldiers and police officers to countries such as Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Rwanda, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, Ghana, and also parts of China. At times, China has sent more than double the number of personnel than the combined total of other permanent members on the Security Council.¹⁰³ This has sparked concerns from some in the West that China will try to reshape peacekeeping in ways that will benefit Beijing,¹⁰⁴ but others have argued that China sees greater strategic advantage in engaging the US and other Western powers through UN Peacekeeping, noting that China is even willing to sign on to mandates that include language about protecting civilians and advancing human rights that may run counter to its own security objectives at home.¹⁰⁵ In other UN related areas, China has participated in a series of Ad Hoc Committees to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of

¹⁰¹ Linda Lew, "China's nominee wins Interpol seat despite concerns of human rights groups," *South China Morning Post*, November 25, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3157409/chinas-nominee-wins-interpol-seat-despite-concerns-human>.

¹⁰² "No Room to Run: China's Expanded Mis(use) of INTERPOL since the Rise of Xi Jinping," *Safeguard Defenders*, November 15, 2021.

¹⁰³ Richard Gowan, "China's Pragmatic Approach to UN Peacekeeping," *Brookings*, September 14, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/chinas-pragmatic-approach-to-un-peacekeeping/>. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹⁰⁴ Lwanga Egbewatt Arrey, "China's Push for Normative Change in UN Peacekeeping," *Institute for Security and Development Policy*, May 28, 2023, <https://isdps.eu/un-peacekeeping-china-pushing-for-normative-changes/>.

¹⁰⁵ Gowan, "China's Pragmatic Approach."

Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes, with the sixth and most recent session taking place in New York in 2023.¹⁰⁶

Chinese police are also active in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). SCO is a multilateral association that aims to ensure security and stability in Eurasia that was established in June 2001 by Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and now includes India and Pakistan.¹⁰⁷ In 2023, Chinese MPS head Wang Xiaohong noted security concerns for SCO include terrorism, separatism, and extremism and strengthening cooperation on transnational crime such as telecom and intent fraud, online gambling and drug trafficking.¹⁰⁸ Wang has also stressed the importance of stabilizing Afghanistan. Apart from internal activities, SCO has worked jointly with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to strengthen cooperation in narcotics response.¹⁰⁹

Police cooperation also takes place under the auspices of China-ASEAN. China-ASEAN supports frequent, high-level communication between law enforcement personnel and agreements for cooperation. Member states have established a Law Enforcement Capacity Building Round Table that has taken place four times since its inception as the China-ASEAN and Neighboring Countries Police Academy Presidents Forum. The most recent meeting in August 2023 focused on border security and was co-organized by MPS, Yunnan Province and Cambodia and included representatives from China, Cambodia, Brunei, India, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.¹¹⁰ In terms of formal

¹⁰⁶ "Six Session of Ad Hoc Committee," *United Nations*, https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/cybercrime/ad_hoc_committee/ahc_sixth_session/main. Read on October 3, 2023.

¹⁰⁷ "General Information," *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, <http://eng.sectsc.org/cooperation/20170110/192193.html>. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹⁰⁸ "China Calls on SCO Members to Deepen Cooperation on Law Enforcement, Security," *Xinhua*, March 30, 2023. https://english.www.gov.cn/statecouncil/WangXiaohong/202303/30/content_WS6424cb4dc6d0f528699dc68e.html. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹⁰⁹ "UNODC and Shanghai Cooperation Organization Conduct a Side Event to Discuss Strategic Priorities for Further Cooperation," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, <https://www.unodc.org/centralasia/en/news/unodc-and-shanghai-cooperation-organization-conduct-a-side-event-to-discuss-strategic-priorities-for-further-cooperation.html>. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹¹⁰ "China-ASEAN Police Academies Forum," <https://www.police.gov.hk/offbeat/1238/eng/9005.html>. Read on October 15, 2023.

agreements, in 2017 China and ASEAN signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in non-traditional security issues.¹¹¹ In 2016, the Yunnan Police College in Kunming also announced police training programs for 2,000 officers from ASEAN Nations.¹¹²

7. Activities of Chinese Police Actions Abroad

As is evidenced by the bilateral and multilateral ties that involve Chinese police, the government often arranges dialogues, signs agreements, and follows through on efforts to increase police to police interactions. One additional form of international engagement not discussed above are the police liaison officers that are dispatched abroad. In 2021, the Chinese government noted that, since 1998, the PRC has sent nearly 90 police liaison officers to 44 countries.¹¹³ The practice of sending liaison officers is quite common in many countries and represents just one more venue where the Chinese police participate in the larger global policing system.¹¹⁴

All of these international police engagements and arrangements raise questions about how actual interactions play out. Below, I group overseas police activities according to function: bilateral police cooperation, efforts to catch criminals abroad, and the widely discussed police service centers. Bilateral police cooperation efforts are particularly diversified and involve, in

¹¹¹ "ASEAN, China sign memorandum of understanding on cooperation in non-traditional issues," ASEAN, September 21, 2017, <https://asean.org/asean-china-sign-memorandum-of-understanding-on-cooperation-in-non-traditional-issues/>. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹¹² "China Focus: China, ASEAN Push Pragmatic Law Enforcement Cooperation," ASEAN, April 1, 2016, http://www.asean-china-center.org/english/2016-04/01/c_135243458.htm. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹¹³ Wu Chunyang, "Strengthen International Police Cooperation through Win-Win Cooperation" "携手共赢 加强国际警务合作," *China Police Daily*, August 14, 2021, http://epaper.cpd.com.cn/szb/wwwcpd_9/dzb_16465/rmga/2021/2021_08_14/16466_2021_08_14_26772/#986071. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹¹⁴ Frederic Lemieux. "Inside the Global Policing System: Liaison Officers Deployed in Washington, DC." *Global Governance* (2015): 161-180.

order of increasing degree of interconnectedness, training, hot lines, joint patrols, and police cooperation centers.

Bilateral Police Cooperation Activities

Training

Policing groups in China frequently pursue and engage in joint training opportunities. In total, the Chinese government says it has trained more than 20,000 police officers from law enforcement departments in 116 countries, “covering all areas of crime fighting and all levels of law enforcement work.”¹¹⁵ More specific breakdowns according to region is spotty, but one analysis identified Asian countries as receiving almost 40% of China’s foreign police training.¹¹⁶ Moreover, between 2018 and 2021, the Chinese government said it trained over 2,000 law enforcement officers from the African continent and provided police supplies to their cities.¹¹⁷

Training can take place either at home or abroad. The China People’s Police University and the China Peacekeeping Police Training Center are two of the primary coordinators for police training, but other universities and centers are also involved. An article in People’s Public Security News noted that more than 150 diplomats stationed in China and representatives of international organizations in China visited the University and the Center in 2021 to observe anti-riot drills and peacekeeping activities.¹¹⁸ As detailed earlier, the PAP also hosts training exercises for international partners.

Joint training represents an opportunity to participate in tangible person to person interactions and share information and techniques. The frequency of these events suggests that Chinese officials highly value these interactions and are well positioned to continue offering training to officers from abroad.

¹¹⁵ Wu, “Strengthen International Police Cooperation.”

¹¹⁶ Link, “The Expanding International Reach.”

¹¹⁷ “Full Text: China and Africa in the New Era: A Partnership of Equals,” *Xinhua*, November 26, 2021, http://www.news.cn/english/2021-11/26/c_1310333813.htm, Read on October 2, 2023.

¹¹⁸ Wu, “Strengthen International Police Cooperation.”

Hotlines

The ability of Chinese nationals who are living, working, and visiting abroad to speak the local language also appears to be an important issue for police authorities seeking to establish or deepen bilateral cooperation. Security related hot lines for Chinese people have been confirmed in both Serbia¹¹⁹ and South Africa (discussed in detail below).

These hotlines are different than the agency to agency contact hotlines mentioned by Liao Jinrong in his interview about MPS International Cooperation Bureau Activities.¹²⁰ Those contact hotlines are meant to establish a channel for communication between government entities, whereas the hotlines in Serbia and South Africa are designed to help Chinese citizens abroad access police related assistance. For example, a Chinese national residing in Cape Town, South Africa might experience trouble reporting a crime because they lack the language skills to communicate with police or are otherwise unsure of how to contact the correct authorities. A local hotline can help them bridge this gap by providing an operator who speaks Chinese and who can direct them to the proper station and provide translation services if necessary.

Joint Patrols

Like the hotlines, joint patrols are a less common but still significant cooperation. The patrols first made international news in 2016 following an agreement between the Italian and Chinese governments. In these reports, photos of uniformed Chinese officers on the streets of Rome helping Chinese tourists in front of scenic ancient sites were widely circulated.¹²¹ After what appears to have been an initial success, another set of joint patrols was announced in 2018

¹¹⁹ “Chinese Police Officers Join Serbian Colleagues.”

¹²⁰ “Ping An Online Interview: Liao Jinrong.”

¹²¹ Italian patrols are discussed in greater detail below. For an early report of the patrol activities, see “Chinese Police to Patrol Rome’s Streets,” *The Guardian*, May 2, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/02/chinese-police-to-patrol-the-streets-of-rome>, Read on October 15, 2023.

between China and Croatia for a one-month patrol in Zagreb.¹²² Since that time, four additional patrols have occurred in Croatia, including the latest cooperation in 2023.¹²³

In addition to the cooperation with Italy and Croatia, China and Serbia signed an agreement in 2019 for joint police patrols that occurred in tourist heavy areas of Belgrade.¹²⁴ In recent years, Serbia has become an important destination for Chinese nationals who wish to engage in tourism or commerce. Moreover, both Serbia and Croatia are included in China's Belt and Road initiative, a wide ranging, China-led infrastructure project that has encouraged more people-to-people exchanges between countries. Reports at the time noted that patrols are largely intended for assistance, and the Chinese officers in Belgrade have no power to make arrests.

While officials on the Chinese side may be eager to expand the patrols, the practice is not without controversy. In November 2023, Thai officials quickly walked back talks of joint patrols that had aimed to provide services and security to Chinese nationals visiting or living in Thailand.¹²⁵ The plan reportedly attracted criticism from Thai citizens and even the country's police chief, who may not have been involved in the initial discussions.

Cooperation Centers

Cooperation Centers are the final area of police cooperation and represent the deepest level of engagement. The first Chinese Community and Police Cooperation Center was opened in 2004 in Johannesburg following a spate of murders of Chinese nationals in 2003 as well as a series of robberies targeting Chinese owned or operated warehouses.¹²⁶ The most recent center

¹²² "Joint Chinese-Croatian Police Patrol Welcomed by Tourists, Locals," *China-CCEE Cooperation*, August 12, 2023, http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/rwjl/202308/t20230821_11129523.htm. Read on October 15, 2023

¹²³ "China-Croatia joint police patrol to improve security in Croatian tourist cities," *Xinhua*, July 19 2023, http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/jmhz/202307/t20230728_11119281.htm. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹²⁴ "Chinese Police Officers Join Serbian Colleagues on the Beat in Belgrade," *Reuters*, September 23, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-serbia-china-patrols/chinese-police-officers-join-serbian-colleagues-on-the-beat-in-belgrade-idUSKBN1W81B0>. Read on October 2, 2023.

¹²⁵ "Thailand Drops Joint Patrols with Chinese Police after Public Backlash," *Reuters*, November 14, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thailand-drops-joint-patrols-with-chinese-police-after-public-backlash-2023-11-14/>. Read on December 15, 2023.

¹²⁶ Zhao Yanrong, "Center Brings Security to Chinese in Johannesburg," *China Daily*, 25 March 2013, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2013-03/25/content_16344315.htm. Read on October 1, 2023.

was opened in 2018, marking the 13th such entity in South Africa.¹²⁷ The cooperation centers tend to be relatively small and aim to provide translation services and assistance to Chinese nationals who need to access basic local police services in South Africa. In Johannesburg in 2013, a complementary Chinatown South African Police Service Reporting Center was also opened to provide assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week.¹²⁸

When the news of the police service stations first broke, some online commentators confused the service stations and cooperation centers. While the service stations may have been inspired by the cooperation centers, the two are different. Cooperation centers were mutually agreed upon by the South African and Chinese governments as an answer by to a safety problem for Chinese nationals living and engaging in business pursuits abroad. Our research team did not find evidence of cooperation centers outside of the 13 centers in South Africa, although there are reports of failed attempts to establish a similar overseas police cooperation center in Tanzania.¹²⁹ More details about the centers are presented in the South African case study below.

Catching Criminals Abroad

Another area of overseas police involvement entails the pursuit of criminals abroad, and China has repeatedly stated the need to address transnational crime. Often the bilateral and multilateral ties described above will result in formal documents that outline commitments, and in some cases an action plan. For example, one such memorandum of understanding was signed between Chinese and Serbian interior ministers in May 2019 to allow for both “joint exercises of special police units and cooperation in fighting cybercrime.”¹³⁰ Full documents are often inaccessible, but we know from one analysis of available data on bilateral agreements

¹²⁷ Abdur Rahman Alfa Shaban, “South Africa gets 13th Chinese Police Co-op Unit, Language Center, *Africanews*, 11 February 2018, <https://www.africanews.com/2018/11/02/south-africa-gets-13th-chinese-police-co-op-unit-language-center/>. Read on October 1, 2023.

¹²⁸ Zhao, “Center Brings Security.”

¹²⁹ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “Exclusive: Inside a Beijing-linked Chinese Help Center in Tanzania,” *Axios*, December 6, 2023, https://www.axios.com/chinese-service-center-africa?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axioschina&stream=china.

Read on December 14, 2023.

¹³⁰ “Chinese Police Officers Join Serbian Colleagues.”

that key topics include counterterrorism, transnational crime, counter-drug efforts, and border security.”¹³¹

China is especially interested in catching criminals abroad and bringing them home for prosecution. President Xi Jinping has built a reputation on fighting corruption at all levels of government, but enforcement is difficult when suspects flee or take their assets and/or family members abroad. In response, Operation Fox Hunt was first launched in 2014 by MPS to help officials and police locate and extradite Chinese fugitives overseas.¹³² Although the government has been careful not to publicize specific details of the program, government documents identify the program as being critical to advancing anti-corruption efforts and addressing other economic crimes. In September 2022, Xinhua announced that 9,165 corruption fugitives had been extradited from 120 foreign countries and regions, with police recovering over 20 billion yuan.¹³³ However, there is concern among some nations and human rights watchers about the repressive methods used to repatriate suspects¹³⁴ and the use of Fox Hunt tactics to target political dissidents.¹³⁵ In particular, American officials have cited concerns about Fox Hunt, noting that Chinese officials refuse to work through traditional legal channels to resolve the cases.

¹³¹ Link, “The Expanding International Reach”

¹³² “The Ministry of Public Security Deploys Arrest Operations to Target Fugitive Overseas Economic Crime Suspects” “公安部部署缉捕行动剑指在逃境外经济犯罪嫌疑人,” July 22, 2014. https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2014-07/22/content_2722492.htm. Read on October 14, 2023.

¹³³ “China Focus: China’s Anti-Corruption Endeavor Yields Tangible Results in Past Decade,” *Xinhua*, September 19, 2022, <https://english.news.cn/20220919/0baf5fdf35204030bf785eab43feadc5/c.html>. Read on October 14, 2023.

¹³⁴ Jennifer Peltz, “3 Men Convicted in US Trial that Scrutinized China’s ‘Operation Fox Hunt’ Repatriation Campaign,” *Associated Press*, June 20, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/china-repatriation-operation-fox-hunt-trial-new-york-01f96f6952e772efb5814c12316922dc>. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹³⁵ Michael S. Schmidt, “U.S. Charges 9 in Plot to Harass Chinese Dissidents,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/28/us/politics/china-harassment-fugitives.html>. Read on October 15, 2023.

Relatedly, Operation Skynet was launched as a collaborative effort in 2015 to return corruption targets who fled abroad.¹³⁶ This cooperation involves the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee, The Supreme People's Procuratorate, MPS, and the People's Bank of China. Organizationally, Skynet is a more comprehensive strategy for carrying out China's international anti-corruption campaign, and the Chinese government has said Skynet operations sent back 1,273 fugitives to China in 2021. In at least 22 of those cases, INTERPOL Red notices were used to assist in the return of fugitives.¹³⁷ As with Fox Hunt, there are concerns about both tactics and targets.¹³⁸

Chinese Police Service Stations

Adding to the controversies of Fox Hunt and Skynet are concerns about overseas police stations. In the initial Chinese news reports, the overseas police service stations were openly touted as an innovative achievement that provided "convenient police services" to overseas Chinese nationals.¹³⁹ Notably, the establishment of the stations dates back to at least 2018, meaning they are more an extension of the South African cooperation center model than a pure pandemic creation. Yet unlike the cooperation centers, it appears many host countries were unaware of the service stations' existence. Several nations, including the Netherlands, thus swiftly announced investigations into the stations shortly following the initial Public Defenders report, citing both concerns of sovereignty and national laws restricting the

¹³⁶ "China launches anti-corruption "Skynet" operation to catch a group of corrupt officials who fled abroad" "中国启动反腐"天网"行动 将抓一批外逃贪官," *Sina*, March 26, 2015, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2015-03-26/175731649218.shtml>. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹³⁷ "1,273 Fugitives Returned to China Last Year to Face Justice," *Global Times*, February 25, 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202202/1253173.shtml?msclkid=240dc0bca8d411ec96a62cbfd253dbe6>. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹³⁸ "China Announces Expansion of Sky Net and Long Arm Policing," *Safeguard Defenders*, March 28, 2022, <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/blog/china-announces-expansion-sky-net-and-long-arm-policing>. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹³⁹ For the best online version of this article, "The Lishui Public Security Bureau Extends the "Feng Qiao Experience" Overseas, Loving and Protecting Overseas Chinese to Achieve Global Service" "丽水这个公安局将"枫桥经验"延伸至海外, 爱侨护侨实现全球服务", published on May 23, 2019, see cached google article link: http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:YLWVL4_74_gj:i.cztv.com/view/13192197.html&hl=en&gl=us. Read on October 14, 2023.

operations of foreign government entities.¹⁴⁰ But even as investigations were launched in places such as Canada,¹⁴¹ the United Kingdom,¹⁴² and Ireland,¹⁴³ not every nation expressed public concern. Notably, government representatives from both Serbia and Hungary were silent or dismissive of the reports.¹⁴⁴

Another reason the police service stations have received so much attention is the revelation that so many countries were affected. The initial Safe Safeguard Defenders report¹⁴⁵ cited evidence of service stations in 29 countries.¹⁴⁶ One source was a list from the Fuzhou City Public Security Bureau (Fujian Province) of 30 overseas police service stations in 25 cities in 21 countries, while another source contained details of Qingtian County's (Zhejiang Province) establishment of overseas services centers.¹⁴⁷ A follow up report published by Safeguard Defenders in December 2022, also added data from public security bureaus in two additional Chinese cities: Nantong (Jiangsu Province), and Wenzhou (Zhejiang Province). These reports

¹⁴⁰ Isabella Kwai and Emma Bubola, "Dutch are Investigating Reported Illegal Chinese Police Stations," *The New York Times*, 26 October 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/26/world/europe/china-police-netherlands.html>. Read on October 14, 2023.

¹⁴¹ Jeremy Nuttall, Nicholas Keung, "RCMP Investigating China's 'police stations' in Toronto Region," *Toronto Star*, October 26, 2022, https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/rcmp-investigating-china-s-police-stations-in-toronto-region/article_07ee3ff0-fadc-5ee2-ad0d-cd0ea6fa28c2.html. Read on October 14, 2023.

¹⁴² "Nicola Sturgeon in Police Talks Over 'Secret Chinese Base'," *BBC News*, October 27, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-63417175>. Read on October 14, 2023.

¹⁴³ Jack Power and Conor Gallagher, "Chinese Overseas Police Station in Dublin Ordered to Shut," October 27, 2022, <https://www.irishtimes.com/crime-law/2022/10/27/chinese-overseas-police-station-in-dublin-ordered-to-shut/>. Read on October 14, 2023.

¹⁴⁴ Akos Keller-Alant, Mila Djurdejevic, Reid Standish, "Reports of China's Overseas 'Police Stations' Spark Controversy, Denial in Hungary and Serbia," *Radio Free Europe*, November 9, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/reports-china-policestations-controversy-denial-hungary-serbia/32122899.html>. Read on October 14, 2023.

¹⁴⁵ Dubbed 110 Overseas, this moniker refers to 110, China's emergency service hotline number, and does not, as some international news reporters have interpreted, refer to the number of overseas Chinese police stations.

¹⁴⁶ Safeguard Defenders, "110 Overseas."

¹⁴⁷ "The Lishui Public Security Bureau Extends the 'Feng Qiao Experience' Overseas."

brought the total number of reported countries to 53.¹⁴⁸ Figure 4 shows a map of the affected countries.

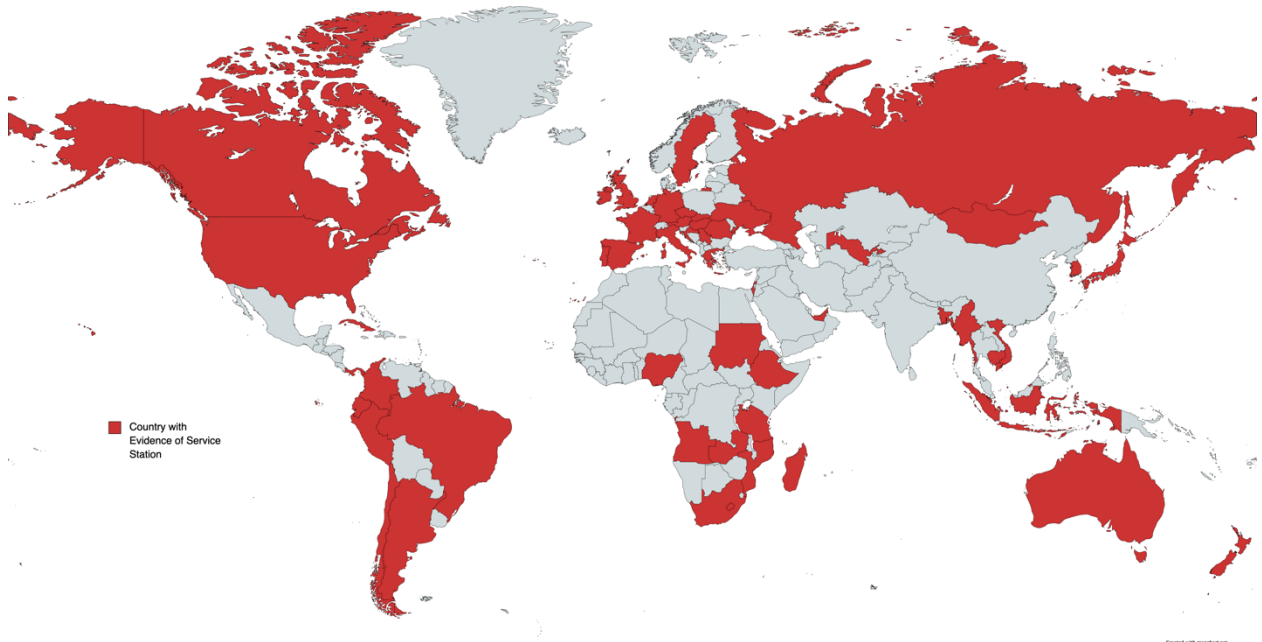


Figure 4 - Map of Overseas Police Service Stations

Functions of the Service Stations

The news of the service stations naturally elicited many questions about their function and intent. Perhaps the most commonly cited and least controversial service provided by the centers was driver's license renewal.¹⁴⁹ In 2022, many Chinese cities still required individuals to renew their driver's license in person, which was difficult due to zero COVID quarantine restrictions and the unprecedented high airfares required to return home. While drivers license renewal would have been easier before the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, it still could have been a valuable service for individuals who were unable or unwilling to travel.

¹⁴⁸ Safeguard Defenders, "Patrol and Persuade." December 2022, <https://safeguarddefenders.com/en/patrol-and-persuade>. Read on September 1, 2023.

¹⁴⁹ Di Giulia Pompili, "Chinese Policeman in Italy: From Joint Patrol to a Virtual Police Station," *Il Foglio*, September 5, 2022. <https://www.ilfoglio.it/esteri/2022/09/05/news/chinese-policemen-in-italy-from-joint-patrol-to-a-virtual-police-station-4390907/>. Read on October 13, 2023.

Moreover, similar tele-policing efforts have long been a feature in China for police trying to manage heavy caseloads. For example, as early as 2009, some stations were allowing individuals to lodge petition complaints in select locations via video conferencing.¹⁵⁰

Other services touted by the service centers veer more squarely into the local policing territory of host countries. One article from a newspaper associated with China's Qingtian County described the experience of a Chinese woman in Budapest who had approached the Chinese police service center to help her recover money that was stolen from her.¹⁵¹ The article reports that people at the center used surveillance footage from a convenience store to locate the suspect, a Romanian, and managed to recover the money through "negotiation and education." In such instances, it appears the service stations aimed to bypass local police and take matters into their own hands, even when non-Chinese nationals were involved.

Some stations may have also assisted in Fox Hunt and Skynet operations and other attempts at intimidation. A party body in Jiangsu province, for example, posted an article online that said Nantong City Overseas Police Linkage Service Centers had helped "capture and persuade more than 80 criminal suspects to return to China."¹⁵² Moreover, there is some evidence to suggest that the service stations may be keeping tabs on and in some cases even contacting overseas Chinese nationals who are critical of the regime while residing abroad. In the United States, an F.B.I. case against overseas police service stations in New York notes that an MPS official asked Lu Jianwang, then a leader of the service station, to confirm the location of a Chinese political dissident living in California.¹⁵³

Chinese Response to the Criticism of the Police Service Stations

¹⁵⁰ Paulina Hartono, "Liaoning Police Take Live Video Petition," *China Digital Times*, December 11, 2009. <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2009/12/liaoning-police-take-live-video-petition/>. Read on October 13, 2023.

¹⁵¹ Megha Rajagopalan and William Rashbaum, "With F.B.I. Search, U.S. Escalates global Fights Over Chinese Police Outposts," *The New York Times*, January 12, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/12/world/europe/china-outpost-new-york.html>. Read on October 13, 2023.

¹⁵² Rajagopalan and Rashbaum, "With F.B.I. Search."

¹⁵³ Martin Purbrick, "The Long Arm of the Law(less): The PRC's Overseas Police Station," *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, June 12, 2023, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-long-arm-of-the-lawless-the-prcs-overseas-police-stations/>. Read on September 28, 2023.

Representatives of the Chinese government have become increasingly critical of international concerns about the service stations, and at the start of the controversy their strategy is best described as one of explain and deflect. For example, when Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Wopke Hoekstra announced on November 1st, 2022 that the police service stations were “unacceptable” and must close immediately,¹⁵⁴ Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian responded the following day with, “The organizations you mentioned are not police stations or police forces... Their activities are to assist local Chinese citizens who need to apply for online renewal of their expired driver’s license, and provide activities related to physical examination. The agency’s volunteers there are enthusiastic overseas Chinese, not Chinese police officers.”¹⁵⁵

As the controversy grew, Chinese government officials began denouncing foreign concerns about the stations as “disinformation,” or attempts to smear or discredit China.¹⁵⁶ Typically, the officials have not denied the existence of the stations but have instead tried to reframe them. One of the most recent statements posted on the Ministry of Public Security’s website clarifies, “they are not so-called police stations or police service centers at all,” instead referring to them vaguely as “relevant institutions” or “relevant service centers.”¹⁵⁷

Official Chinese accounts have furthermore emphasized that the police service stations are not staffed by Chinese police personnel, instead noting that the stations are staffed by volunteers, often from local Chinese community associations, who wish to help their compatriots. Finally, MPS stated in May 2023 that “relevant service centers have been closed,” due to the “evolving COVID situation and relevant services now available online.”

¹⁵⁴ “Chinese Police Stations in the Netherlands Must Close Immediately” “Chinese Politiebureaus in Nederland Moeten per Direct Dicht,” *De Telegraaf*, November 1, 2022. <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/659990180/chinese-politiebureaus-in-nederland-moeten-per-direct-dicht>. Read on September 28, 2023.

¹⁵⁵ “China Denies Having Police Stations in the Netherlands” “China Ontkent Politiebureaus te hebben in Nederland,” *De Telegraaf*, November 2, 2022.

¹⁵⁶ Mps.gov. “There is No So-Called Overseas Police Stations (sic),” *Ministry of Public Security*, May 16, 2023, <https://www.mps.gov.cn/n2255079/n6865805/n7355748/n7355818/c9045928/content.html>. Read on September 29, 2023.

¹⁵⁷ Mps.gov, “There is No So-Called Overseas Police Stations (sic).”

8. Case Studies of Chinese Police Interactions Abroad

Specific case studies can reveal even more about the way Chinese policing groups interact with individual nations. Evidence from South Africa, Italy, and the United States show a wide range of experiences with policing authorities from China. While all three have extensive, documented contact with Chinese police and police adjacent individuals, they each take different approaches to managing police relations and responding to reports of the Chinese police service stations.

South Africa

In South Africa, police cooperation has a nearly 20-year history. Throughout the opening of the police cooperation centers and the expansion of related services, representatives from both the South African and Chinese governments have publicly spoken about the function and intent of these collaborations, and the 13th center opened in Port Elizabeth with speeches and fanfare.¹⁵⁸ Both sides maintain that the centers are not police stations,¹⁵⁹ and the first Safeguard Defenders report does not name evidence of stations in South Africa, although the follow up report notes that stations with ties to police in Fuzhou and Wenzhou were established in Johannesburg.¹⁶⁰

Reports from the Chinese state media cite the history of violent attacks against Chinese nationals and their property as the reason for opening the police cooperation centers.¹⁶¹ One report also references language barriers facing Chinese residents, citing a 2013 statistic that 90 percent of the 300,000 Chinese people in South Africa do not speak English.

¹⁵⁸ Socraties Mbamalu, "13th Chinese Community and Police Co-operation Centre opened in South Africa," *This is Africa*, November 2, 2018. <https://thisisafrika.me/politics-and-society/13th-chinese-police-cooperation-centre-south-africa/>. Read on October 1, 2023.

¹⁵⁹ Matt Schrader, "'Chinese Assistance Centers' Grow United Front Work Department Global Presence," *The Jamestown Foundation*, January 5, 2019. <https://jamestown.org/program/chinese-assistance-centers-grow-united-front-work-department-global-presence/>. Read on October 5, 2023.

¹⁶⁰ "Patrol and Defend," p. 7.

¹⁶¹ Zhao, "Center Brings Security."

A public statement from the Chinese Consulate-General in Cape Town in 2018 noted that the centers' main responsibilities are to "participate in the community policing mechanisms led by SAPS (South Africa Police Service), and to cooperate closely with the SAPS in preventing and combating criminals against (the) Chinese community in SA (South Africa)."¹⁶² The statement further notes that the centers are strictly non-profit Chinese associations with no law enforcement authority and praises the ability of the centers to safeguard "the personal and property safety of local communities, including the Chinese community in SA."

In terms of documented activities, the centers publish articles in Chinese newspapers about crimes and safe practices and aim to help victims who might otherwise be afraid to engage the legal system. When specific spates of crime occur, Chinese government websites may also direct people to the centers.¹⁶³ Xu Peihua, secretary-general of the Johannesburg Center in 2013, told *China Daily* that most victims will refuse to accuse their attackers in court due to fear. He went on to describe an encounter with the owner of a Chinese noodle house that was directly across the street from the center. He said the owner was so afraid of being followed by the people who robbed his shop that he sent the center a note asking for a different location to meet.

Beyond assisting with translation services and crime reporting, staff from the center also work alongside South African and Chinese police to address crime. In one crackdown launched by Chinese and South African police in 2013, state media reported that the centers helped collect information that led to the arrests of 37 people suspected of underground activities and prostitution.¹⁶⁴

Beyond the cooperation centers, strong bilateral policing ties between China and South Africa are also observed in the area of police training. In 2019, Fujian Police College launched a

¹⁶² Yu Yong. "The So-Called '13 Chinese Police Stations in South Africa' Is Totally Fakes News." *Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Cape Town*, November 2018, http://capetown.china-consulate.gov.cn/eng/xwdt/201811/t20181116_6968483.htm. Read on October 10, 2023.

¹⁶³ Mfa.gov.cn. "Consulate General in Johannesburg Reminds Chinese Citizens to Pay Attention to Safety," 驻约翰内斯堡总领馆提醒中国公民注意安全防范, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, July 25, 2023. https://www.mfa.gov.cn/wjzfwfwpt/kzx/tzgg/202307/t20230725_11117418.html. Read on October 5, 2023.

¹⁶⁴ Zhao, "Center Brings Security."

training program for the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD).¹⁶⁵ For this program, 28 JMPD officers traveled to China for two weeks as part of a government sponsored program to learn about firearm and unarmed defense techniques. Some of the training, however, has invited controversy. In 2016, reports emerged of police in China training a special force of South African police who were targeting political dissidents. At the time, the SA force was labeled by some as a “death squad” and later disbanded under President Cyril Ramaphosa.¹⁶⁶

Controversy about the cooperation centers has also surfaced. In November 2018, Yu Yong, Minister Counsellor and Spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in South Africa publicly responded¹⁶⁷ to a podcast episode released on the Dr. Mumbi Show entitled “13 Chinese ‘Police Stations’ in South Africa! Why?.”¹⁶⁸ Listener statistics for the podcast are not available, but public comments on social media appear to have spurred representatives from the Chinese government to respond.¹⁶⁹ Yu Yong’s statement notes, “This fake news has stirred up quite aggressive verbal attacks online, fueling a culture of hatred, and undermining the friendship between the peoples of China and South Africa.”¹⁷⁰ The statement went on to dismiss the report/podcast as irresponsible, lacking in due diligence, and violating the basic professional ethics of journalism before citing the favorable relations between the two nations and clarifying that the 13 South African Chinese Community and Police Cooperation Centers in question are part of the South African Police Service’s Community Police Forum (CPF), noting that the “Chinese Community in South Africa have taken the lead in responding to the South African CPF Initiative.”

¹⁶⁵ Chris Erasmus, “Chinese Experts Train Crime-Hardened Police of South Africa’s Biggest City,” *South China Morning Post*, September 3, 2019. <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/africa/article/3025494/chinese-experts-train-crime-hardened-police-south-africas-biggest>. Read on October 12, 2023.

¹⁶⁶ ADF Staff. “Chinese Training for Foreign Police Raises Human Rights Concerns,” *African Defense Forum*, June 6, 2023, <https://adf-magazine.com/2023/06/chinese-training-for-foreign-police-raises-human-rights-concerns/>. Read on October 12, 2023.

¹⁶⁷ Yu, “The So-Called ‘13 Chinese Police Stations.’”

¹⁶⁸ Mumbi Serake. “13 Chinese ‘Police Stations’ in South Africa! Why?.” *Dr. Mumbi Show*. 5 November 2018, <https://www.audacy.com/podcast/dr-mumbi-show-333d6/episodes/13-chinese-police-stations-in-south-africa-why-20807>. <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/dr-mumbi-show>, Read on October 10, 2023.

¹⁶⁹ Schrader, “Chinese Assistance Centers.”

¹⁷⁰ Yu, “The So-Called ‘13 Chinese Police Stations.’”

Interestingly, the statement also provides details about the role of two Chinese police liaison officers at the Chinese Embassy in South Africa, explaining their responsibilities are to, “coordinate the exchanges and cooperation between the Chinese and South African police department, assist the SAPS in handling the cases involving Chinese, cooperate in the establishment of the joint security mechanism between Chinese communities and local police departments, and guide the Chinese citizens in South Africa on Safety precautions.” Regarding the allegation that these officers are in charge of the centers, Yu Yong writes, “anyone with basic IQ would wonder how would it be possible that merely two Chinese police liaison officers could manage the so-called ‘13 Chinese police stations’ in South Africa, still less to ‘colonize Africa’?”

Finally, there is some evidence of cooperation center connection to the United Front.¹⁷¹ Two different chair persons of the police cooperation centers, Wu Shaokang and Li Xinzhu, also held leadership positions in United Front bodies. United Front groups and individuals serve a political function to advance the interests of the Communist Party abroad. In practice, United Front work involves multiple government groups and representatives that pursue a wide range of goals, and recent United Front projects include vaccine diplomacy and promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative. Given the importance of the police centers to Chinese interests abroad, it is unsurprising that some leaders are also linked to the United Front.

The information that Li and Wu are connected to the United Front actually raises another question about the experience of people managing and working at the police cooperation centers. Li and Wu were both successful business persons before assuming their duties, and both continued business operations in some capacity during their tenures. Neither have prior experience in policing or police adjacent activities. Less is known about the backgrounds of staff at the centers and whether or not they have police experience.

Despite some public concern about the centers over the last decade, police cooperation between China and South Africa appears strong. This is likely due to the long history of police cooperation and mutual interactions as well as general goodwill built by the history of China’s

¹⁷¹ Schrader, “‘Chinese Assistance Centers.’”

support for anti-Apartheid movements in South Africa.¹⁷² Notably, the South African government has not announced an investigation into the police services center, nor has it ordered the closure of cooperation centers.

Instead, the nations have continued high level political exchanges post-pandemic, and in June 2023, South African Police Minister Bheki Cele met with their counterpart, Chinese State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong, in Beijing, with both sides pledging to strengthen cooperation in security and law enforcement.¹⁷³ On Cele's five day trip to China, the South African delegation of police leaders visited police stations in Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen and went to the People's Public Security University.¹⁷⁴ A statement on the South African side noted that members of SAPS specialized units had recently received combat and education training and graduated from the university. Regarding top priorities, the statement also noted economic crimes, collaboration to deal with violent crimes through technological interventions, and the safety of nationals residing in both countries. The two met again just a few months later at the 2023 Conference of Global Public Security Cooperation Forum in Lianyungang, Jiangsu Province.¹⁷⁵ Such meetings show a commitment on both sides to continuing a close relationship.

Italy

Bilateral ties with Chinese police also have a history in Italy. As noted previously, the nations began a series of joint patrols in 2016 between Italian and Chinese police officers as a way to better assist the roughly three million Chinese tourists who visited the country.¹⁷⁶ Italian

¹⁷² For a discussion of this history see: Ian. Taylor, "The Ambiguous Commitment: The People's Republic of China and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in South Africa." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 18, no. 1 (2000): 91-106.

¹⁷³ "China, South Africa Pledge to Strengthen Security Cooperation," *Xinhua*, June 8, 2023, <https://english.news.cn/20230608/7ea5d8f019934a6c87518322f45854f6/c.html>. Read on October 10, 2023.

¹⁷⁴ www.gov.za, "Minister Bheki Cele Wraps Up Successful Policing Visit to China," *South African Government*, June 11, 2023, <https://www.gov.za/speeches/police-minister-and-saps-high-level-delegation-wrap-successful-policing-visit-china-11-jun>. Read on October 10, 2023.

¹⁷⁵ "China's Police Chief Meets Guest from South Africa, Suriname, Nigeria, Pakistan," *Xinhua*, September 21, 2023, <https://english.news.cn/20230921/a1997d463435499dbf26644c91c6bbe6/c.html>. Read on October 10, 2023.

¹⁷⁶ Sylvia Poggioli, "Chinese Cops in Italy? Joint Patrols Aim to Ease Chinese Tourists' Jitters," *NPR*, May 11, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/05/11/477630160/chinese-cops-in-italy-joint-patrols-aim-to-ease-chinese-tourists-jitters>. Read on October 5, 2023.

national police chief Alessandro Pansa said at the time that he hoped the efforts would give police on both sides an opportunity to exchange information, share resources, and encourage a deeper level of international cooperation. He also noted that patrols would help combat “the criminal and terrorist groups that afflict our countries.”

At the announcement of the first patrols, Wang Gang, head of the European Division of the Ministry of Public Security’s International Bureau, said that the two countries had signed a memorandum the previous year that laid out plans to send Chinese officers to Italy during the peak tourist season every year.¹⁷⁷ The patrols took place between 2016 and 2019 but were suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷⁸ Rather than prolonged, permanent engagements, each patrol mission was a relatively short assignment, usually 10 days to a few weeks at a time. All patrols took place in highly trafficked tourist destinations such as Rome, Milan, Venice and Prato.¹⁷⁹

Per reports of the memorandum, the patrols were also two sided.¹⁸⁰ In 2017, the Italian police sent a delegation to Beijing and Shanghai to engage in street patrols like the ones in Italy.¹⁸¹ In 2019, another police patrol delegation went for joint patrols in Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, and Guangzhou, where they provided assistance to Italian tourists visiting those cities.

Similar to South Africa, Chinese state media reported that Chinese police planned to work with Italian police in Rome and Milan to set up a hotline for Chinese nationals and engage in

¹⁷⁷ “Chinese Join Italians for police Patrols to Boost Safety,” *China Daily*, May 4, 2016. http://english.www.gov.cn/news/international_exchanges/2016/05/04/content_281475341435744.htm. Read on October 5, 2023.

¹⁷⁸ Reuters.com, “Italy Stops Joint Police Patrols with China – Interior Minister,” *Reuters*, December 19, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/italy-stops-joint-police-patrols-with-china-interior-minister-2022-12-19/>. Read on October 5, 2023.

¹⁷⁹ Cheng Cheng, “Chinese Police Leave for Joint Patrol in Italy,” *Xinhua*, May 28, 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/28/c_137213096.htm. Read on October 12, 2023.

¹⁸⁰ “Chinese Join Italians.”

¹⁸¹ Zhang Yangfei, “Italian, Chinese Police to Jointly Patrol Tourist Attractions in Both Countries,” *China Daily*, June 25, 2019. <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201906/25/WS5d1178a5a3103dbf1432a01f.html>. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-chinese-clash/italys-biggest-chinese-community-clashes-with-police-near-florence-idUSKCN0ZH5XS>. Read on October 12, 2023.

conversations to better understand the security situation for Chinese visitors.¹⁸² While Chinese nationals in Italy are not subject to the same levels of violence that Chinese in South Africa face, petty crimes are not uncommon and violent attacks and even clashes with the police have occurred. In Florence, for example, a protest erupted in the summer of 2016, shortly after the first patrols were announced, when Chinese factory owners and workers clashed with government inspectors and police.¹⁸³ Presumably, a hotline could help diffuse and address similar problems in the future.

The period of warm relations between police on both sides shifted in the months following an exposé by *Il Foglio* in early September 2022¹⁸⁴ and the Safeguard Defenders Report the following month. *Il Foglio* reported that a Fuzhou Overseas Police Service Station was being promoted on WeChat, a popular messaging platform in China, to Chinese residents in Prato. The WeChat article included photos of service station officers and informed residents that the station could assist Chinese residents in Italy who needed to handle various “domestic affairs.”

As with service stations in other areas, screenshots show the Wechat article featured an example of a Chinese citizen using the service center to connect via video chat with a police officer in Fuzhou to obtain a driver’s license without needing to return home in person. In addition to the police service center reported by *Il Foglio*, the Safeguard Defenders report identified three additional overseas police stations in Milan, Rome, and Florence.

The Italian government was slightly slower than other countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Canada to announce an investigation,¹⁸⁵ but by late December, an interior minister in the Italian government said joint patrols with Chinese police on Italian soil would cease.¹⁸⁶ The question of joint patrols, however, remains separate from the overseas Chinese police service centers. Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi clarified in a statement to the Italian parliament in December 2022 that the joint patrol pact had nothing to do with the

¹⁸² “Italian, Chinese Police to Jointly Patrol Tourist Attractions.”

¹⁸³ Silvia Ognibene, “Italy’s Biggest Chinese Community Clashes with Police Near Florence,” *Reuters*, July 1, 2016.

¹⁸⁴ Pompili, “Chinese Policeman in Italy.”

¹⁸⁵ Wilhelmine Preussen, “Italy Hosts Largest Number of Shadow Chinese ‘Police Stations’ Worldwide, Report Says,” *Politico*, December 5, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-hosts-most-illegal-chinese-police-stations-worldwide-report/>. Read on October 5, 2023.

¹⁸⁶ Reuters.com, “Italy Stops Joint Police Patrols with China.”

establishment of any police service stations in Italy. In an interview with *Il Foglio* newspaper, he further reiterated that the patrols, “will no longer be practiced or replicated in other forms.”

As for the service centers in Italy, Piantedosi told the Italian parliament in the December 2022 session that an investigation had only uncovered one police station in Prato, which was already closed and no longer provided any services.¹⁸⁷ He noted that investigations into other locations were still in progress. At the time, the campaign director for Safeguard Defenders, Laura Harth, was critical of this response, calling Piantedosi’s remarks “very disappointing,” and noting that Italy was “particularly reluctant to act,” and “refusing to recognize the issue.”

In January 2023, Piantedosi appeared before the Italian Senate to follow up on the issue, noting that the police and intelligence agencies were carrying out “targeted investigations.”¹⁸⁸ He noted that inquiries in Milan, Prato, and Rome had identified several “cultural associations” that were carrying out “activities of administrative processing such as passport and driving license renewal and assistance in cases of accident or illness. Cultural associations contact numbers have also appeared on government websites pages aimed at assisting Chinese nationals in South Africa who are victims of crime, but there may be significant variation in the type of assistance these associations provide.”¹⁸⁹

Since the cancelling of the patrols, there have been no additional public reports of cooperation between Italian and Chinese police. Unlike in South Africa, it appears that public controversy over the service stations has effectively suspended previously warm relations between police in the two nations.

The United States

The case of police interactions in the United States is even more fraught. As U.S.-China political tensions have increased, the space for police cooperation has narrowed. Nevertheless, there are certain areas in which the two nations continue to cooperate.

¹⁸⁷ Nick Squires, “Italy Accused of Turning a Blind Eye to Clandestine Chinese ‘Police Stations’,” *The Telegraph*, 10 December 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/12/10/italy-accused-turning-blind-eye-clandestine-chinese-police-stations/>. Read on October 12, 2023.

¹⁸⁸ “Rome Cranks up the Pressure on Chinese Police Stations,” *Decode 39*, January 13, 2023. <https://decode39.com/5532/italy-chinese-police-stations/>. Read on October 12, 2023.

¹⁸⁹ Mfa.gov.cn, “Consulate General in Johannesburg.”

Cyber security is one area where competition and distrust exists but where dialogue has continued. In 2015, the US and China began participating in a series of high-level joint dialogues on combatting cybercrime, an issue which is of mutual concern. The director of the MPS International Cooperation Bureau, said the two agreed on a set of guiding principles for the issue, established a hotline mechanism, and carried out practical cooperation on several cases.¹⁹⁰ Most recently in 2023 at the military level, US defense officials held a working level meeting with counterparts from the Defense Attache Office of the PRC Embassy and the Central Military Commission's Office for International Military Cooperation to discuss the 2023 DOD Cyber Strategy Unclassified Summary, although no officials from MPS were part of this dialogue.¹⁹¹

In years past, academic exchange has also offered an opportunity for Chinese police to engage with police in the United States. In 2012, for example, it was reported that 15 students from Zhejiang Police College in Hangzhou were spending a year studying criminal Justice at Sam Houston State University in Texas.¹⁹² More recently, there is evidence that government officials and police bureaus have declined overtures to participate in joint police cooperations like those in South Africa or Italy.¹⁹³ Current and former New York law enforcement officials told the New York Times that at least one Chinese province tried to arrange for their officers to train with the New York Police Department (N.Y.P.D.) and other police in cities with large Chinese communities.¹⁹⁴ These sources said representatives from Chinese police groups also wanted to sign a memorandum outlining the details of training with the N.Y.P.D., but such arrangements were never made due to concerns that the N.Y.P.D. might become "an unwitting partner in a campaign of surveillance and harassment."

¹⁹⁰ "Ping An Online Interview: Liao Jinrong."

¹⁹¹ "U.S. and PRC Hold Working Level Meeting on 2023 DOD Cyber Strategy Unclassified Summary and Related Cyber Issues" Department of Defense, September 22, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3535629/us-and-prc-hold-working-level-meeting-on-2023-dod-cyber-strategy-unclassified-s/>. Read on October 15, 2023.

¹⁹² Matthew Hilburn, "China Studies US to Revamp Police Force," *Voice of America News*, June 6, 2012, <https://www.police1.com/international/articles/china-studies-us-to-revamp-police-force-56CdAsEjyXru1wH7/>.

¹⁹³ Note – this may change – we are still looking for specific references to Chinese police training with US.

¹⁹⁴ Rajagopalan and Rashbaum, "With F.B.I. Search."

By comparison to other nations, the United States has responded aggressively to reports of the unofficial police stations operating on U.S. soil by pursuing legal action. The initial Safeguard Defenders report named one police service station operating in New York, which was finally confirmed by the FBI in April 2023 when documents released by the Justice Department detailed the arrest of two individuals residing in New York City for operating what investigators determined was a provincial branch of the Ministry of Public Security.¹⁹⁵ In November 2022, FBI director Christopher Wray told lawmakers at a U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing that the FBI was “very concerned” about the existence of the station, but he declined to go into further detail about the investigation.¹⁹⁶ Beyond the station under investigation, additional stations in New York and Los Angeles operated by police in Wenzhou were also identified in the second report by Safeguard Defenders, but U.S. government officials have yet to officially confirm or deny their existence.

Details about the New York case are still forthcoming, but the report reveals that the station was located in Manhattan’s Chinatown and took up an entire floor of an office building that also housed a Chinese community organization.¹⁹⁷ The station voluntarily closed sometime in fall 2022 after the suspects became aware of the FBI’s investigation. Details of the arrest began to trickle out in January 2023, and upon their arrest in April, the two defendants, who are both American citizens,¹⁹⁸ were charged with conspiring to act as agents of a foreign government, which carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.¹⁹⁹ Because the defendants deleted related communications about station activities on their cellular phones, they are also charged with obstruction of justice, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

¹⁹⁵ “Two Arrested for Operating Illegal Overseas Police Station of the Chinese Government.”

¹⁹⁶ Michael Martina and Ted Hesson, “FBI Director ‘very concerned’ by Chinese ‘police stations’ in U.S.,” *Reuters*, November 17, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/fbi-director-very-concerned-by-chinese-police-stations-us-2022-11-17/>. Read on October 13, 2023.

¹⁹⁷ Rajagopalan and Rashbaum, “With F.B.I. Search.”

¹⁹⁸ William Rashbaum and Karen Zraick, “F.B.I. Arrests Two on Charges Tied to Chinese Police Outpost in New York,” *The New York Times*, April 17, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/17/nyregion/fbi-chinese-police-outpost-nyc.html>. Read on October 13, 2023.

¹⁹⁹ “Two Arrested for Operating Illegal Overseas Police Station of the Chinese Government.”

Interestingly, the report from the Department of Justice identifies the service station as the “Fuzhou Branch of the MPS” and describes it as a provincial branch. As noted earlier, Fuzhou city is the provincial capital of Fujian Province; thus, the provincial ministry is based in Fuzhou but would normally be referred to as the Fujian Provincial Public Security Bureau (江西省公安厅). This wording may be an oversight or may reveal some degree of coordination between Fuzhou city police and the Fujian Provincial PSB. The official report also alleges that the defendants were acting under the “direction and control of an MPS Official,” yet it provides no other information about that person’s division or rank.

The official arrests were announced the same day as two other China related cases²⁰⁰ and were accompanied by strong language rebuking the Chinese government. F.B.I. assistant director in New York, Michael Discoll, said in a press conference, “It is our belief that the ultimate purpose of this illegal police station was...to silence, harass and threaten individuals here in the United States.”²⁰¹ U.S. Attorney Breon Peace for the Eastern District of New York is quoted as saying, “This prosecution reveals the Chinese government’s flagrant violation of our nation’s sovereignty.”

On the Chinese side, embassy spokesperson Liu Pengyu said after the first announcement of the investigation that the sites are not police stations and are not staffed by “police personnel from China,” adding, “There is no need to make people nervous about this.”²⁰² After the arrests, Wang Wenbin, a foreign ministry spokesperson called the charges “political manipulation...China firmly opposes the U.S. smearing China and hyping up the so-called cross border suppression plan.”²⁰³ The strong political language used by both sides shows how the police service station controversy has created further rifts in the U.S. China relationship.

²⁰⁰ The first case is an amended complaint that accuses a former China-based Zoom executive of censoring commemorations of the Tiananmen Square incident. The second charged 34 MPS officers with operating a “troll farm” to attack Chinese dissidents. All defendants are believed to be in China and thus outside of extradition territory. See Rashbaum and Zraick, “F.B.I. Arrests Two.”

²⁰¹ Rashbaum and Zraick, “F.B.I. Arrests Two.”

²⁰² Rajagopalan and Rashbaum, “With F.B.I. Search.”

²⁰³ Rashbaum and Zraick, “F.B.I. Arrests Two.”

9. Conclusions

The case studies present three very different approaches to managing Chinese police presence. In South Africa, claims of police service stations beyond the established community centers has not been addressed publicly by the government, and friendly bilateral police relations have resumed in the post-pandemic environment. In Italy, government officials have ceased bilateral police engagement and launched an investigation into the reports of service stations in four cities. Meanwhile in the United States, officials have made arrests and brought charges against MPS officials, leading to an escalation of criticism on both sides and further problems for U.S. China relations.

One more case provides insight into the operations of Chinese authorities abroad. In December 2023, a reporter from Axios interviewed Zhu Jingfeng, the director of a Chinese Service Center in Dar es Salaam.²⁰⁴ The Service Center is not a police service station, and according to Zhu does not even have an official affiliation with the Chinese Embassy or government, although language on the Embassy's website and statements from former ambassadors suggests otherwise. Notably, the Service Center performs functions that sound a lot like police work in China, including "assistance with domestic disagreements, immigration issues, and trade and legal disputes," in addition to helping with short-term unemployment and other household emergencies. The Service Center also has ties to the China Council for the Promotion of Peaceful National Reunification, an organization overseen by the United Front Work Department. If all of this sounds familiar, it is. In the Dar es Salaam Service Center, we see echoes of the police cooperation centers in South Africa and even the police service centers where authorities in China and at the embassy work together with staff at the centers to help Chinese residents on the ground but also reinforce ties to the Chinese state. These organizations are in many ways amorphous and flexible and it is possible that the service centers, which operate in many of the same countries that previously held police service centers, may be able to absorb some of the functions from the increasingly defunct police service centers.

²⁰⁴ "Exclusive: Inside a Beijing-Linked Chinese Help Center in Tanzania."

10. Key Findings

By outlining core details of Chinese policing, from its history, organization, and functions at home to a broad range of engagements and activities abroad, this brief puts the recent developments surrounding overseas Chinese police service stations in context. Furthermore, it clarifies a number of core issues for those wishing to understand where international Chinese policing efforts stand today and where efforts might be concentrated in the future.

Key Takeaways from the brief include:

- The Ministry of Public Security is a powerful and highly diversified organization with a wide range of interests and activities.
- Centralization of Chinese policing is nevertheless incomplete, due to resource constraints and shared control with local governments.
- Stability maintenance remains a chief priority of Chinese police in addition to other areas of crime fighting and counterterrorism efforts. Moreover, a wide range of entities are involved in stability maintenance alongside MPS, including the Domestic Security Department, the Ministry of State Security, and the People's Armed Police.
- Under President Xi Jinping, the frequency and types of overseas police involvement have grown. Police engagement is particularly active in INTERPOL and SCO.
- The Chinese government and related police authorities are actively forming bilateral police connections such as training cooperation, and, where interests and needs align, more routine engagement such as joint patrols, establishment of hotlines for Chinese nationals, and police cooperation centers.
- The Chinese government and related police authorities are also actively returning suspected fugitives home through operations Fox Hunt and Skynet. Most of these individuals are tied to corruption and other economic crimes, but some dissidents are being targeted as well.
- News about the police service stations posed a significant public relations challenge for Chinese diplomats and policing officials. The Chinese government has responded negatively and sometimes forcefully to criticisms of their overseas police activities. The harshest criticisms are typically reserved for the strongest actions, such as the service station related F.B.I. arrests, but the announcement of an investigation alone has proven sufficient for government spokespersons to lodge strong criticisms.
- How nations have responded to the controversy over police service stations has deep effects on police interactions with China. In South Africa, the nation's non-response

has allowed police cooperation to continue and even strengthen. In Italy, concerns over the service stations effectively ended long standing cooperative patrols.

- Many police service stations are now closed due to investigations, orders from the government, and changes to government policy. The Ministry of Public Security has stated that the need for police service stations – renewal of driving licenses – is now obsolete due to changes in online renewal.