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Internal security with a ‘global vision’: an analysis of China’s national security strategy and its manifestations in transnational law enforcement in Europe

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Abstract

Following the recent establishment of a China–Hungary law enforcement cooperation agreement, the issue of Chinese transnational law enforcement in Europe has once again been brought to the forefront of the European foreign policy debate. This study aims to highlight how similar agreements and actions across Europe, such as establishing Chinese police stations and prosecuting anti-corruption campaigns like Operation Fox Hunt, reflect China’s strategy of globalising its internal security apparatus to protect regime security. Through an analysis of English- and Mandarin-language Chinese national security documents as well as recent reports on Chinese law enforcement activity in Europe, this study argues that these activities are part of a broader effort to assert global influence and reshape the international order in favour of an illiberal regime security model in line with China’s national regime security strategy.

Keywords

Europe • internal security • People’s Republic of China (China) • transnational repression

INTRODUCTION

In February 2024, following a meeting between China’s Minister of Public Security ‘Wang Xiaohong’ and Hungarian Prime Minister ‘Viktor Orbán’ and Interior Minister ‘Sándor Pintér’, the two nations signed an agreement to cooperate on judicial and internal security matters, paving the way for Chinese–Hungarian joint police patrols and law enforcement cooperation (Cseke, 2024). While not unprecedented (similar patrols have occurred in Serbia, Croatia and Italy), this agreement appeared deeper and more far-reaching, prompting the European Commission to inquire on whether to launch an infringement procedure against Hungary (European Parliament, 2024b). In April, the EU Parliament debated the issue, with all speakers agreeing that this agreement amounted to a form of foreign interference. Katalin Cseh, a liberal Hungarian member called it ‘foreign meddling in EU affairs’. Reinhard Bütikofer, a German MEP, warned that it signalled China was ‘pushing its totalitarian policies not only internally but also across their borders’ (European Parliament, 2024a, p. 187).

Hungary is a recent example of Chinese influence on European security, but it is not the only one. China employs various

mechanisms to interfere with European internal security, including joint police patrols, Chinese police stations and aggressive anti-corruption campaigns with questionable legality. This trend extends globally, from Africa to the United States, raising serious concerns among policymakers.

This study does not aim to adjudicate the extent to which these actions represent a national security threat to European nations. Rather, it argues that these actions are part of a predictable playbook as China seeks to assert global influence. In this study, first I will examine Chinese national security strategy and the importance of internal security. Then, I will show how China seeks to globalise this strategy. The main body of the study will discuss two major mechanisms by which China has initiated this strategy in Europe: (1) unilateral transnational repression through anti-corruption campaigns and (2) bilateral and multilateral law enforcement cooperation. Finally, I will conclude with some future implications of these findings.

Numerous authors have argued that China’s national security strategy is based on internal security (Chestnut, Ford, Mastro). This study builds on their work by analysing previously unexamined Chinese-language sources to understand how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

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conceptualises transnational law enforcement and its role in national security. Research on Operation Fox Hunt and transnational repression has expanded in recent years. Rotella's ProPublica investigation details the programme's tactics in the United States, while Harth and Chen provide a detailed global analysis, cataloguing many of the cases examined in this study. Eder and 110 Overseas offer valuable insights into law enforcement cooperation but do not specifically address Fox Hunt.

This study extends existing scholarship in three ways. First, it uses untapped Chinese and European news media sources to document Fox Hunt operations and transnational repression, placing these activities within the broader context of Chinese transnational law enforcement in Europe. Second, it examines Chinese-language sources not previously analysed in English-language literature. Finally, it contextualises Chinese transnational repression within the broader CCP national security framework by incorporating primary sources from the Chinese government on national and internal security. The news media and primary sources analysed aim to outline the broad contours of this strategy through recent, politically relevant examples, rather than providing an exhaustive account.

Before examining China's methods of transnational law enforcement, it is crucial to understand the established frameworks for international police cooperation. Such cooperation is often governed by bilateral treaties on extradition, joint patrols, and intelligence sharing. Additionally, Interpol facilitates communication, coordination, and cooperation among law enforcement agencies worldwide in pursuing international fugitives (Interpol, 2017). These methods are widely employed globally.

As I describe, many of these legal methods appear in China's regime security playbook. However, China also employs unilateral transnational policing tactics, pursuing law enforcement objectives abroad without host nation consent. These actions can violate international norms and laws, such as Article 4(2) of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), which prohibits unilateral law enforcement activities in another state without the host government's consent (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2003, p. 15). These unilateral tactics and their use by China will be explored in more detail.

Through an analysis of official Chinese government documents and Chinese and European news reporting, I argue that China's use of unilateral transnational repression—via Operation Fox Hunt and police cooperation agreements across Europe—represents a strategic effort to globalise its internal security apparatus. This strategy seeks to reshape the liberal international order in favour of illiberal governance, thereby advancing CCP regime security in line with its national security strategy.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A national security strategy or a regime security strategy?

China's national security strategy is fundamentally an internal security strategy: CCP regime security and political stability are not just prerequisites for national security, they are national security. Consequently, China's foreign policy largely aims to strengthen regime security and CCP control (Ford, 2021). Because the cornerstone of 'national security' in China is political security, that is, protection of the CCP and Xi Jinping, non-traditional national security threats such as dissent and political instability receive heightened attention (Chestnut, 2024, p. 37). In the 2014 Overall National Security Concept, China's guiding document on national security strategy, Xi Jinping highlighted the centrality of the Party in Chinese national security, directing the government to respect the primacy of political security in national security decision making [政治安全放在首要位置] (Zongti guojia anquan guan, n.d.).

This emphasis on internal security within the Chinese national security strategy is evident in Xi's 2018 decision to place the People's Armed Police (PAP) under the control of the Central Military Commission (CMC), transferring decision-making power from local municipalities to the central Party structure (Wuthnow, 2019, p. 4). Concurrently, Xi urged all national security agencies to develop a 'global vision,' thereby globalising a strategy of regime security ('Xi Calls for Global Vision,' 2017).

Thus, we can conclude that China conducts foreign policy as a tool for maintaining and strengthening the Party's domestic control. This strategy is demonstrably in contrast with those of most Western countries. The President of the United States, for instance, does not typically make foreign policy decisions solely to secure re-election or help his party maintain legislative majorities. Rather, the United States articulates its national security policy, and thus its foreign policy, as an avenue to secure American national interests, promotes democratic rules and norms, and alleviates suffering (The White House, 2022). China's strategic decision-making is notably different, and its actions on the world stage must therefore be viewed through this lens.

If China's national security strategy is driven by a regime security strategy, how therefore, does China conduct its foreign policy? What tools does it use? Under Xi Jinping, China has begun to globalise its internal security apparatus to protect state and Party power. For instance, as the Center for American Progress notes:

The CCP is using China's Ministry of Public Security (MPS), its national police service and domestic security force, across the globe ... by influencing security sector governance to undermine respect for the rule of law and

human rights. Under Chinese President Xi Jinping, the MPS has significantly expanded its overseas activities, increasingly using security cooperation as a tool to expand its influence and shape global norms (Link, 2022).

This plan to increase security cooperation is also reflected in Party messaging. At the National Public Security International Cooperation Work Conference in 2017, Meng Jianzhu, the former Chinese Minister of Public Security, emphasised that international public security cooperation was vital to China's global role. He also emphasised the need to 'adhere to the leadership of the Party ... and always maintain a high degree of ideological, political and operational unity with ... Xi Jinping as the core [必须始终坚持党的领导, 始终在思想上政治上行动上同以习近平同志为核心的党中央保持高度一致]' (Quanguo gong'an guoji hezuo gongzuo huiyi zaijing zhaozhai, 2017). In other words, China's external international public security cooperation plan is predicated on the supremacy of Party ideology. While not surprising, it serves as another reminder that China's conduct in international fora, including public security and law enforcement, is designed to serve the Party and its regime security. While China might contribute to goals of global progress if they align with the mission of Party control, we can also expect that China will deviate from Western norms and expectations if the CCP calculates such a choice will benefit their internal security.

As China globalises its internal security apparatus, it seeks cooperation with other nations. In other words, unlike the United States, which seeks to be an external security partner through arms sales, formalised mutual defence treaties, or overseas bases, China seeks to become an internal security partner (Mastro, 2024, p. 70–75). China's mechanism of achieving power projection and global influence runs through this strategy. A 2017 report by the Mercator Institute for China Studies shows that Chinese law enforcement agreements span every region of the globe (Eder et al., 2017). These agreements include joint patrols, such as those in Europe, and training agreements, like the extensive training of African police officers in China (Nantulya, 2023). China has also expanded its range of bilateral extradition treaties, effectively allowing China to enforce its judicial system beyond its border in service to regime security (Ford, 2021).

Although China claimed at the National Public Security International Cooperation Work Conference that their rationale for international law enforcement cooperation lay in a desire for a 'shared future for human security [人类安全命运共同体]' and 'win-win cooperation [共赢]' (Quanguo gong'an guoji hezuo gongzuo huiyi zaijing zhaozhai, 2017), the evidence suggests a more cynical, or at least more calculated rationale—China exports its internal security apparatus to bolster regime legitimacy. Because this is the basis of their

national security and power projection strategy, as articulated above, these principles guide their decision making in public security cooperation.

Through two major examples of Chinese power projection in Europe, I demonstrate that China projects power by exporting internal security to strengthen the CCP. China views exporting internal security and illiberalism as central to regime security, and thus as central to its national security.

Operation Fox Hunt and transnational repression

In Europe, China has attempted to globalise CCP regime security through Operation Fox Hunt, an anti-corruption campaign that has evolved into a campaign of transnational repression of dissent and extrajudicial enforcement of Chinese domestic law abroad.

Operation Fox Hunt [猎狐专项行动] was launched in 2014 by Xi, ostensibly to root out corruption within the Chinese government and civil society. Initially branded as a campaign to arrest 'fugitive economic crime suspects [缉捕逃经济犯罪嫌疑人]' abroad (Song, 2014), it has been well documented that this often translates to purging and imprisoning political dissidents and individuals deemed a threat to Party rule (China: Transnational Repression, 2021). Domestically, such operations might be seen as a mere portion of China's authoritarian order. However, its international nature makes Fox Hunt a quasi-legal transnational repression campaign. Even from the programme's inception, China's Ministry of Public Security made clear that it intended to leverage China's 'extensive establishment of law enforcement and security cooperation [广泛建立执法安全合作机制的优势, 深化国际警务合作]' with other nations (Song, 2014).

The scale of the operation is not immediately clear. Some reports claim Operation Fox Hunt has led to the capture and arrest of more than 8,000 targets (Rotella and Berg, 2021); others say more than 12,000 (Harth and Chen, 2024, p. 37). Either way, experts agree that through Operation Fox Hunt and other operations, China now conducts 'the most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive campaign of transnational repression in the world' (China: Transnational Repression, 2021).

The CCP employs various methods to conduct Operation Fox Hunt. Their strategy is laid out (at least partially) in a 2018 interpretation of Supervision Law of the PRC crafted by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (Di liu zhang fan fubai guoji hezuo di wushi'er tiao, 2018). Chapter 6 of this law discusses 'international cooperation' in anti-corruption cases. The interpretation of this law details five methods that Chinese authorities can use to bring people back to China: (1) extradition [引渡], (2) deportation from host country to China [遣返], (3) prosecution in host country followed by deportation [异地起诉], (4) persuasion and repatriation [劝返], and (5) kidnapping and entrapment [绑架, 诱捕]. It is

telling that China publically outlined 'kidnapping' as a valid mechanism to address corruption. There are documented cases of this blatant violation of international law in service of regime security. For instance, in 2016, Chinese special forces were alleged to have kidnapped a Chinese dissident from Thailand (Iyengar, 2016). However, evidence shows that persuasion and repatriation is the most common strategy used by Chinese officials—a strategy employed frequently in Europe (Eder et al., 2017).

There is a certain art to this persuasion. After all, Chinese law enforcement is attempting to persuade targets to abandon their free life to return to prison time. How does China manage to successfully undertake this persuasion? While there are Chinese government media accounts of these operations, they cannot be trusted to detail persuasion tactics accurately. Nonetheless, both Chinese and Western investigative reports reveal that China often uses the targets' relatives as coercion tools. The non-profit, Safeguard Defenders, in its study titled *Chasing Fox Hunt*, tracked down 283 documented examples of Fox Hunt in action around the world. This is far fewer than the true number of successful returns, which Safeguard Defenders estimates to be around 12,300 (Harth and Chen, 2024, p. 37–57). Nonetheless, through an examination of some of the successful Fox Hunt persuasions from Europe, we see a pattern of how China conducts extrajudicial transnational repression.

For instance, Zhou Hong returned to China in 2017 after living in France for 13 years. Wanted in China for alleged embezzlement of public funds, Zhou's return to China was the result of dedicated persuasion by a Chinese 'fugitive pursuit task force [追逃专案组办案]' (Hu and Liao, 2017). This task force convinced Zhou's son-in-law, and later, Zhou's daughter, to assist them, praising both for their patriotism. The task force carefully considered how to 'integrate emotion, law, and reason [如何将情法理更好的融合来回复张某的质疑]' into their persuasive technique (Hu and Liao, 2017). Ultimately, the committee resorted to what appears close to a direct threat, telling Zhou that 'The Party ... has woven a global anti-corruption "Skynet" ... If you flee, you must be pursued to the end, even if you flee to the ends of the earth [党 ... 编织了全球反腐'天网', 有逃必追, 一追到底, 哪怕逃到天涯海角也要追回来]' (Hu and Liao, 2017). With this, Zhou surrendered.

Zhou Wen Hai, similarly, returned to China in 2020 after living abroad for 27 years (Lu, 2021). Wanted on corruption charges, Zhou's return to China was also due to persuasion by a fugitive task force that built connections with Zhou's family. In his confession, written after his return to China, he warned others not to flee, because ultimately 'the law is long and there is no loophole. No matter how far or how long you run, you will eventually be punished by law [法网恢恢疏而不漏, 不管逃多远、多久, 终究会受到法律的制裁]' (Lu, 2021).

There are many more examples of how China uses clandestine persuasion campaigns in Europe. Mao returned from Italy after 'repeated ideological work [一次次思想工作]' on him and his family (Fan, 2015). Zhu Luxin returned from Italy after 'meticulous ideological work [细致思想工作]' on his relatives that convinced them to help the task force 'break down [Zhu's] psychological barrier [最终突破朱立新心理防线]' (Yan, 2018).

In many cases, family members are used as pawns. Former FBI Deputy Assistant Director Bradley Benavides, chief of the China branch of the bureau's counterintelligence division, stated that China uses 'pressure, leverage, threats against family ...' to get what they want (Rotella and Berg, 2021), including through (1) exit bans on family members of targets (Kellogg, 2019), (2) direct threats to relatives in China (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2020), and (3) holding of hostages (FBI, 2020). All three of these tactics explicitly violate international laws and norms (FBI, 2020).

Beyond the questionable legality of China's tactics, there are questions about China's targets. A recent ProPublica investigation of Operation Fox Hunt revealed that while some targets are 'Chinese public officials and businesspeople accused—justifiably and not—of financial crimes', others are 'dissidents, whistleblowers or relatively minor figures swept up in provincial conflicts' (Rotella and Berg, 2021). Former US Assistant Attorney General for the National Security Division 'John Demers' told ProPublica that 'the Chinese government has used the anti-corruption campaign ... with a political purpose' (Rotella and Berg, 2021), and former FBI Director 'Christopher Wray' conveyed a similar belief, stating that Operation Fox Hunt 'targets, captures, and repatriates former Chinese citizens ... whom it sees as a political ... threat' (FBI, 2020). This aligns with the scholarly understanding that Chinese transnational repression typically targets political dissidents, Uighurs, Hongkongers and Tibetans, all of whom are seen as threats to regime security (China: Transnational Repression, 2021).

Operation Fox Hunt exemplifies how China projects and globalises its internal security apparatus and strategy abroad. The CCP's strategy of targeting dissidents abroad serves a dual purpose: neutralising active opposition and deterring potential dissent. By demonstrating that even those who flee China cannot escape its reach, the CCP sends a powerful message to the public. As Zhou Hong's pursuers told him, the CCP has constructed a net that will pursue targets to the 'ends of the earth [天涯海角]' (Hu and Liao, 2017).

Bilateral and multilateral global law enforcement cooperation

The second way China has globalised its internal security apparatus to strengthen CCP regime security is through joint-police patrols and law enforcement cooperation with European nations. This not only assists China in its transnational

repression campaigns but also shifts the international order to reflect a more illiberal Chinese model, thus legitimising CCP internal security repression.

I discuss four distinct types of law-enforcement cooperation mechanisms utilised by the CCP in Europe: (1) joint patrols, (2) establishment of police stations, (3) technology sales, and (4) aggressive use of Interpol. For each, I will provide examples of how this technique has manifested in Europe.

1. Joint patrols: Typically, following a bilateral law enforcement agreement between China and a European nation, a small delegation of Chinese police officers will join their European counterparts in patrols of major tourist sites. The stated goal of the programme is to help make European tourist destinations more welcoming for Chinese tourists, but questions have been raised as to whether there are ulterior motives (European Parliament, 2024b).

In Serbia, for instance, starting in late September 2023, nine Chinese police officers began their second joint patrol with local Serbian police officers in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Smederevo, which Chinese state-media described as ‘cities frequented by Chinese tourists’ (Chinese Policemen Relaunch Joint Patrols in Serbia, 2023). Around the same time, eight Chinese police officers began joint patrols with their Croatian counterparts in Zagreb, Zadar, Plitvice Lakes National Park and Dubrovnik, ostensibly to ‘enhance the security of Chinese tourists and overseas Chinese in Croatia’ (China-Croatia Joint Police Patrol, 2023).

Italy initiated joint patrols with Chinese law enforcement in 2016, a programme China praised as advancing the ‘internationaliz[ation] [国际化]’ of its law enforcement efforts (Bai, 2016). However, Italy recently suspended these patrols after non-profit Safeguard Defenders reported the presence of illegal Chinese police stations in Italy. Italian officials also raised concerns that Chinese officers were aiding intelligence operations targeting Chinese nationals on Italian soil, violating international norms of state sovereignty (Pompili, 2022).

Hungary is the latest nation to sign this type of law enforcement agreement with China, raising concerns within the EU about violations of sovereignty. Following the agreement, the U.S. Ambassador to Hungary, David Pressman, warned that close law enforcement ties with China often ‘come with strings attached, and the interest is often paid in sovereignty’ (US Envoy Warns, 2024). This concern was echoed in an April 2024 EU Parliament debate, where Hungarian MP Katalin Cseh described the joint patrols as ‘foreign meddling in EU affairs and a significant risk to EU security’ (European Parliament, 2024a, p. 189). One key issue is the potential for Chinese access to sensitive information. Scholars have

warned that agreement, which includes cooperation in border control, might allow Chinese officers to access Schengen Information System (SIS) data (Chinese Police Deployments, 2024, p. 2). I have not found evidence suggesting this has occurred. However, it is more probable that these patrols could facilitate illegal Chinese police operations targeting Chinese nationals in Europe through transnational repression campaigns like Fox Hunt.

2. Police stations: The Chinese government’s network of overseas police stations represents a sharp departure from cooperative law enforcement. A 2022 report by Safeguard Defenders revealed at least 36 such stations operating across Europe, often involved in quasi-legal transnational repression campaigns. In response, several nations launched investigations and shut them down (110 Overseas, 2022, p. 13). The official purpose of these stations is to assist Chinese citizens abroad ... but this is a role Chinese embassies and consulates should already be providing. These police stations were not always concealed—in fact, an article published by *guoji ribao* [国际日报], publicly advertised their locations to Chinese citizens worldwide, including Paris, Madrid, Budapest and Porto (Fuzhou gong’an, 2022). However, some stations are operated without the knowledge of the host government. For instance, in 2016, Chinese and Romanian authorities signed an agreement permitting Chinese police to assist in local policing and surveillance efforts in Bucharest (Costiță, 2022). Yet, when Safeguard Defenders exposed the existence of an illegal police station in Dobroesti, Romanian officials denied knowledge of its existence (Brinza, 2023, p. 133).

Even when known to host governments, these stations often engage in legally dubious activities, including transnational repression campaigns like Fox Hunt. A Chinese police station in Serbia, for example, played a key role in pressuring Xia Mou, accused of loan fraud, to return to China for prosecution (Wang, 2019). Similarly, a station in Madrid assisted in persuading Liu, a former waste-processing plant owner who bypassed environmental regulations, to return to China (Shao, 2020). Such cases highlight how these stations support China’s internal security efforts by targeting individuals abroad.

Additionally, some stations are used to intimidate and harass Chinese dissidents. In the Netherlands, investigative reporters uncovered that an illegal station, operating without government consent, had been harassing Wang Jingyu, a Chinese dissident granted asylum in the country (Illegal police stations in the Netherlands, 2022).

3. Surveillance technology sales: Although less common than direct law enforcement cooperation, there is growing concern about Chinese sales of surveillance technology to European nations. A recent investigation by Radio

Free Europe found that state-owned Chinese companies Dahua and Hikvision dominate the surveillance markets in Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Bulgaria, and Georgia (Standish, 2024). Both companies are banned in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom due to concerns about data security and their involvement in creating the surveillance apparatus used in Xinjiang (Harwell, 2020).

However, there is no current ban in the EU.

Serbia's democratic decline (Vascotto, 2024) is in part supported by Chinese sales of surveillance technology. Following the 2019 anti-government protests in Serbia, police installed '1,000 Huawei surveillance cameras across Belgrade equipped with sophisticated facial and car plate recognition software' (Bjelos, 2023).

Radio Free Europe's investigation further found that Chinese surveillance cameras were being used at sensitive sights in Romania, including at Deveselu, the base home to NATO's Aegis Ashore land-based missile-defence system (Benea, 2024). While not necessarily a direct threat, there is concern about hacking vulnerabilities (Tech flaw, 2023) and the potential for the CCP to compel data to be shared under China's 2017 National Intelligence Law (Tanner, 2017). Both companies (Dahua and Hikvision) have denied these allegations.

4. Interpol: While the previous three law enforcement cooperation mechanisms have been bilateral, the fourth is a multilateral approach—the use (or perhaps, abuse) of Interpol. China asserted greater authority in Interpol in 2016 with the election of Meng Hongwei (2016) as its President. Meng led Interpol from 2016 to 2018.

In 2015, China published a list of 100 Chinese citizens overseas it sought to return for prosecution (100 Chinese Fugitives, 2015). While China Daily ran a headline stating 'Interpol launches global dragnet for 100 Chinese fugitives,' this is a mischaracterisation of Interpol's Red Notice system. A Red Notice is not an international arrest warrant but rather a 'request to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action' (Red Notices, n.d.). Critics, including John Sandweg, the former acting director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), argue that China has abused the system for political purposes, including as part of Operation Fox Hunt (Merchant, 2021).

One prominent example is Yang Xianghong, a former Chinese official turned defector. After defecting during a government delegation trip to France in 2008, Yang became the subject of significant CCP attention, after all the escape of a member of government made a huge scandal. He refused to return, and was thus expelled from the Party. In 2009, his wife was arrested on bribery charges, where she confessed that Yang had also committed bribery (Chen, 2009). In 2015, he was

added to the Red Notice list, ostensibly for financial crimes. However, the circumstances suggest his inclusion was driven more by political embarrassment over his defection than by substantive evidence of wrongdoing.

These four types of law enforcement cooperation—joint patrols, police stations, surveillance technology sales and abuse of Interpol—are used by China to strengthen its internal security, and thus, advance its national security strategy. These tactics collectively globalise the CCP's security apparatus and aim to reshape the international order in China's illiberal image. As the Brookings Institution put it in a recent report:

As China builds a more prominent role on the global stage, it is unsurprising that it would seek to cooperate on law enforcement ... Yet China roots these relationships in a domestic ideology that places the security of the state ... above the value of the individual, an approach that is discordant with the values of the United States and other like-minded democracies (Ford, 2021).

In essence, China advocates for an international order that prioritises state control and political stability over liberal values such as the rule of law, accountability, human rights and individual liberty. These law enforcement strategies advance this vision by supporting Chinese transnational repression campaigns, such as Fox Hunt, while legitimising and normalising CCP-style domestic repression. Joint patrols and sales of surveillance technology, for instance, risk normalising repressive practices, such as extensive surveillance and tight control over public spaces—when European police collaborate with Chinese counterparts, they lend credence to these methods. Serbia's purchase of facial-recognition technology from China following the large anti-government protests in 2019 suggest that Serbia took a page from the Chinese internal security playbook. Such actions undermine international norms that prioritise individual freedoms over state power. Additionally, cooperating with European nations bolsters the CCP's international legitimacy and prestige. It allows China to present itself as a responsible global actor with effective internal security practices, deflecting criticism of its human rights record—after all, it becomes harder to condemn a repressive Chinese police state when you rely on its methods for internal security.

China counters these allegations by framing its law enforcement cooperation as a way to protect mutual interests and combat shared threats. It denies allegations of undermining the liberal order or violating sovereignty and dismisses claims of overseas police stations as a 'lie fabricated by the West [西方炮制的谎言]' (Oumeng bu leyile, 2024). However, these assertions conflict with the evidence. The idea that Chinese police stations overseas don't exist is patently false, and as mentioned above, China even publicly advertised them. Moreover, though China claims to follow a foreign policy of non-interference, its actions suggest otherwise. The

CCP prioritises regime security above all else. When non-interference aligns with its domestic political interests, China abides by this principle. Yet, as its law enforcement activities in Europe demonstrate, the CCP is willing to abandon this doctrine if doing so serves its broader goals of consolidating domestic control and reshaping the global order.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction, this study does not aim to adjudicate the impact on national security that bilateral treaties signed between China and European countries have, nor to assess the guilt or innocence of targets of Fox Hunt operations in Europe. However, this does not negate the fact that these actions constitute a departure from liberal Western principles of justice and rule of law. China's unilateral transnational policing efforts violate norms and treaties concerning state sovereignty over law enforcement, and even 'cooperation' agreements risk promoting an illiberal vision of world order that conflicts with Europe's values.

In this study, I have attempted to demonstrate that these tactics are part of a broader strategy to globalise China's internal security apparatus to protect regime security in line with its greater national security strategy. We cannot expect these actions to subside anytime soon. After all, these efforts are fundamental components of Chinese national security strategy.

With the latest expansion of these efforts in Hungary, the EU Parliament is rightly concerned. It is unclear how Europe will respond, but China shows no signs of scaling back its efforts. Following the EU debate on China–Hungary law enforcement cooperation, a Chinese online platform, Tao News, provocatively commented:

But the question is, does this kind of ... slander and defamation work? The international police cooperation of Chinese police will become more and more extensive ... What else can the West ... do except feel uncomfortable? [可问题是，这种造谣、污蔑、诋毁它管用吗？中国警察的国际警务合作会越来越广泛 ... 美西除了难受，又能怎么样呢？] (Guo jingcha kaizhan guoji jingwu hezuo, 2024).

China appears unfazed by Western discomfort, but Europe should not be unfazed by it too. Perhaps this discomfort can spark a necessary conversation on the future of international security cooperation—one that prioritises peace, security and liberty for all.

Further research is essential to address these challenges. Scholars should explore the impact of these strategies on Chinese diaspora communities, particularly the chilling effect

of overseas police stations and Fox Hunt operations on free expression and political activity. Additionally, while some studies have examined European responses to transnational repression, more systematic analysis is needed to identify effective countermeasures and develop legal frameworks to close the gaps in international law that enable such quasi-legal practices.

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