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Policy Brief.

Six Faces of Australia's Police Cooperation in the Pacific.

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'We need to make sure that this [policing initiative] is framed to fit our purposes and not developed to suit the geopolitical interests and geopolitical denial security postures of our big partners.'

Charlot Salwai, Prime Minister of Vanuatu, 2024

Pacific leaders endorsed the Australia-backed Pacific Policing Initiative (PPI) in 2024 amid geopolitical rumblings. Then Vanuatu Prime Minister Charlot Salwai was among those who cautioned against the \$400 million initiative becoming entangled in strategic competition. It must instead be framed to 'fit our purposes', he declared.

Many commentators nonetheless continue to view Australia's police cooperation across the region primarily through a geopolitical lens. This framing reflects a growing consensus that Pacific policing is a ['new front in China-West rivalry'](#). Yet it only captures part of the story.

Reducing Australia's policing partnerships in the Pacific to a matter of strategic competition obscures their long history and the multiple, sometimes conflicting, purposes they serve. It also discounts how Pacific Islands countries themselves understand and engage in these partnerships.

This brief offers a corrective. It identifies six interrelated 'faces' of Australia's police cooperation, each reflecting a distinct purpose. Alongside the geopolitical face, it highlights five others: diplomacy, security, stability, development and governance. Together, they provide a more nuanced framework for understanding Australia's significant and growing investment in regional policing.

As Australia works with its Pacific partners to integrate the PPI into a new regional policing bloc, to be known as 'PACPOL', questions about its intentions will inevitably resurface. Rather than confining the conversation to geopolitics, this is an opportunity to recognise the many faces of Australia's police cooperation in the Pacific.



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Key points.

- Australia's police cooperation in the Pacific is more than a contest for influence with China.
- It has at least six faces—diplomacy, security, stability, development, geopolitics and governance—each with its own functional logic and associated purpose.
- Like a Rubik's Cube, these six faces appear in constantly shifting combinations.
- The geopolitical face may have become more pronounced in recent years, but the others have deeper histories and enduring significance to the Pacific.
- This way of seeing can bring greater rigour to how police cooperation initiatives are conceived, communicated and implemented.

One | The many faces of international policing.

This section introduces the different faces of international police cooperation with reference to recent developments in Pacific policing. The next section explores the evolution of these faces in Australia's regional policing partnerships, and the conclusion discusses the value of this way of seeing and its application to other tools of statecraft.

A new era of Pacific policing

In a region with small and dispersed populations, porous borders and persistent governance challenges, Pacific police services face significant resource and capacity constraints, including in responding to rising transnational crime threats. These pressures are compounded by the outsized security role of police in many Pacific nations, particularly those without standing militaries, providing a strong rationale for regional police cooperation.ⁱ

In May 2026, the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP) briefed a meeting of their ministers in Fiji on efforts to develop a unified regional policing model incorporating the Pacific Policing Initiative (PPI; see [Box 1](#)). To be known as 'PACPOL', it would be the Pacific equivalent of other regional policing bodies like AFRIPOL, AMERIPOL, ASEANAPOL and EUROPOL.

Buried near the bottom of the meeting's [outcomes statement](#), the PACPOL proposal was overlooked by the media at the time. It will no doubt attract closer attention should it get the green light from PICP members.

When the PPI was endorsed by leaders at the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in August 2024, it generated considerable media interest. Much of the coverage focused on the initiative's geopolitical implications, with a typical headline reading: '[Australia wins support for policing pact to counter China](#)'.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* article explained that the PPI was 'designed to counter China's growing security presence in the region' and its progress had 'rankled Beijing'. Maybe so, but the initiative was not merely a geopolitical manoeuvre. Read the article closely, and several other faces of international policing can be identified.

Box 1. Pacific Policing Initiative summary

The [Pacific Policing Initiative](#) (PPI) is a 'Pacific-led, Australian-backed' initiative with three pillars:

- Regional Centres of Excellence to enhance policing capabilities through specialised training and operational support. Proposed locations are Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Vanuatu.
- Pacific Police Support Group, a multinational policing capability to deploy in response to Pacific requests for assistance (e.g. for major event management or crisis response).
- Pacific Police Development and Coordination Hub to support the other two pillars. The Hub is located in Pinkenba, Brisbane.

The PPI responds to several statements from the region, including the [Boe Declaration on Regional Security](#), [PIF Communiqué 2022](#) and the [2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent](#), which call for a family first approach to peace and security and regional solutions to regional security problems.

Australia is providing \$400 million over five years and substantial long-term support to the PPI.

Six faces of international policing

Drawing inspiration from the book *Six Faces of Globalization*,ⁱⁱ we have identified six faces of international policing: diplomacy, security, stability, development, geopolitics and governance. This is not a definitive list, but a practical framework for understanding the multiple purposes that shape Australia’s police cooperation in the Pacific. Each face is characterised by a distinct functional logic and associated purpose, as summarised in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Analytical framework for international policing

Face	Functional logic	Purpose
Diplomacy	Strategic engagement	Build trusted relationships and advance national interests
Geopolitics	Strategic competition	Enhance strategic influence and shape the regional balance of power
Security	Threat management	Detect, disrupt and prevent transnational crime and other shared security threats
Development	Institutional strengthening	Strengthen policing institutions to improve public safety and the rule of law
Stability	Crisis response	Maintain regional order and support peaceful, resilient societies
Governance	International coordination	Enable collective action through regional policing architecture

The six faces are illustrated by the cube in [Figure 1](#). The top and bottom faces (diplomacy and geopolitics) represent the more strategic dimensions of international policing, while the four sides (security, development, stability and governance) have a greater operational focus. Viewed as a whole, the cube reveals the multidimensional nature of police cooperation across borders.

Figure 1. Six faces of international policing



As with a Rubik's Cube, these faces are rarely encountered in isolation but appear together in constantly shifting combinations. [Figure 2](#) depicts the interplay of the six faces. While they often reinforce one another, they can also be in tension, creating trade-offs for policymakers to navigate. Moreover, whatever its purposes, international police cooperation does not invariably deliver positive outcomes and may be contested by the communities it is intended to benefit. ⁱⁱⁱ

Figure 2. International policing in practice



As the more detailed descriptions below illustrate, all six faces are evident in the PPI.

Diplomacy: strategic engagement

Police diplomacy is the conduct of international relations through policing channels. While police officers may be considered unlikely diplomats, [previous research](#) suggests they can be very good ones. As members of a global policing subculture, they share a crime-fighting mission and a sense of professional solidarity. Policing scholar Ethan Nadelmann observes, 'It is this transnational identity—based on the notion that a cop is a cop, and a criminal is a criminal, no matter what their respective nationalities—that provides the oil and glue of contemporary international law enforcement'. ^{iv}

The *Sydney Morning Herald* described the PPI as a 'significant diplomatic victory' for Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. This victory was only made possible by the diplomatic efforts of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and its regional policing partners in jointly conceiving and designing the initiative. Papua New Guinea (PNG) Police Commissioner David Manning [told the media](#) that the PPI was 'police diplomacy at its best'. He continued, 'It's delivering on a shared commitment, on a renewed and reinvigorated commitment to collaborate to best secure our vulnerable communities throughout the region.'

Geopolitics: strategic competition

States also use police cooperation as a vehicle for advancing their broader strategic interests. The relative independence of policing organisations helps insulate their international partnerships from geopolitics, but they are not immune. As strategic competition intensifies, police cooperation is more likely to be drawn into contests for influence. While this may unlock additional funding, it can also create

political friction. This is particularly evident in the Pacific, where Foreign Minister Penny Wong has described Australia as being in a '[permanent contest](#)' with China.

As noted earlier, the PPI was endorsed at the PIF despite pushback from some Pacific leaders. The director-general of the Melanesian Spearhead Group at the time, Leonard Louma, [said the initiative](#) should not be defined by the 'geo-strategic denial security doctrine of our big partners'. The then Vanuatu Prime Minister, Charlot Salwai, used very similar language in his own statement. Asked about a possible policing deal with China, PNG Prime Minister James Marape responded, 'Australia remains our security partner of choice, especially for policing matters.' Geopolitics briefly threatened to derail the initiative, but its broader operational purposes won out.

Security: threat management

There is a [long history](#) of police cooperation across borders to address shared security threats. A core objective is the detection, disruption and prevention of transnational crime through intelligence and evidence sharing. In explaining the need for the PPI, Marape described the Pacific as the 'biggest unpoliced space in planet Earth', saying Pacific nations faced major challenges including drug trafficking and illegal fishing. This view was echoed by then Tongan Prime Minister Siaosi Sovaleni, [who said](#) it was 'really important to have a Pacific-owned and Pacific-led initiative' to tackle increasingly serious criminal challenges.

Development: institutional strengthening

International police cooperation also contributes to the development of low- and middle-income countries by strengthening institutions responsible for upholding the rule of law and contributing to public safety. Through a combination of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and [non-ODA funding](#), this cooperation focuses on training, leadership development, professional standards, policing culture, infrastructure and organisational reform. The Regional Centres of Excellence proposed under the PPI are intended to build sustainable policing capabilities across the Pacific. Declaring that it had been a '[godsend](#)' for Pacific police officers to receive training overseas, Fiji Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka said he was sure the PPI would 'succeed for our benefit'.

Stability: crisis response

Police are often among the first institutions called upon during periods of instability, whether arising from civil unrest, natural disasters or major security incidents. Accordingly, international police cooperation includes the rapid mobilisation of personnel and specialist capabilities to assist partners responding to crises or hosting major events that exceed domestic capacity. This is the intent of the Pacific Police Support Group (PPSG) under the PPI. Commissioner Manning [described the PPSG](#) as 'a clear, effective and agile mechanism through which we can support our Pacific family in times of need to uphold the law and maintain order and security'.

Governance: international coordination

International police cooperation also supports the governance architecture that enables collective action across jurisdictions. This includes the institutions, networks and processes through which police organisations identify shared priorities and deliver joint responses. The most prominent of these at the global level is [INTERPOL](#), which facilitates police cooperation across 196 member countries. In the Pacific it is the PICP, and for the PPI it is the Pacific Police Development and Coordination Hub in Brisbane.

All of these faces have featured in Australia's policing partnerships in the Pacific for decades, with the PPI only the most recent iteration. The next section traces their evolution over time, showing that the geopolitical face has become far more prominent in recent years, while the others have deeper histories.

Two | Australia's Pacific policing partnerships.

Although policing is only one dimension of Australia's deep partnerships with Pacific Island countries, its strong physical presence in the region and the people-to-people connections it fosters make it one of the most visible expressions of Australia's Pacific [integration strategy](#)—the longstanding bipartisan aspiration to knit Australian and Pacific economies, institutions, infrastructure and societies together. Like the integration strategy itself, Australia's Pacific policing partnerships serve multiple, overlapping purposes.

The breadth of Australia's police cooperation across the region is mapped at [Figure 3](#).

The diplomacy face

Building trusted regional relationships and advancing national interests.

The diplomacy face recognises policing as an important part of Australia's regional engagement. Australia seeks to build trusted relationships with Pacific partners to advance shared interests in a stable and secure near region. While police cooperation often supports these interests directly through joint operations and investigations, it also generates a diplomatic dividend. Decades of training, exchanges and development support have built enduring professional relationships that are integral to Australia's ties with the region. Many officers who engaged in these policing partnerships earlier in their careers now occupy senior leadership roles and continue to champion regional cooperation.

Australia's approach to police diplomacy in the Pacific is anchored in police liaison officers and advisers who have been embedded in the region since the [early 1980s](#), just as many Pacific nations were regaining independence. Today, the AFP maintains more than 100 personnel across the Pacific. Their long-term presence provides continuity that extends beyond political cycles, creating some of the strongest people-to-people links in the region.

Liaison officers primarily facilitate operational cooperation between Australian and Pacific law enforcement agencies, supporting coordination, intelligence sharing and requests for assistance. They also play a role in mentoring local counterparts and assisting in identifying emerging threats, sharing lessons learnt from Australian policing and facilitating broader policing networks.

As a result, diplomacy is not simply another face of police cooperation but often works as the enabler for the other five faces. Without sustained investment to build the trust and mutual understanding that underpins cooperation, the effectiveness of Australia's regional policing partnerships would gradually erode, particularly in an era of competition and contest.

Reflecting on the importance of police diplomacy during a [speech](#) to the United Nations Chiefs of Police Summit in July 2026, AFP Commissioner Krissy Barrett observed that she 'cannot help defend and protect Australians and our sovereignty by only doing [her] job in Canberra, just like [her] fellow Pacific police chiefs cannot solely do it from Suva, Port Moresby, Apia or Majuro'. One of the themes of Barrett's speech was the need to amplify the voices of Pacific police chiefs on the world stage, which is part of the impetus for PACPOL.

Figure 3. Australia's police cooperation in the Pacific



The security face

Detecting, disrupting and preventing transnational crime and other shared security threats.

Security has often been the most visible face of Australia's police cooperation in the Pacific. Policing is fundamentally about protecting communities, including through international collaboration to [counter transnational crime](#) and other shared security threats. For the AFP, this reflects a longstanding strategy of [tackling crime at its source](#). While this objective has remained relatively constant, the threats have evolved considerably, as has the way that Australia and its regional partners work together to address them.

As organised crime networks increasingly exploited the Pacific's vast maritime space and limited institutional capacity, the need for regional cooperation grew. The Pacific Transnational Crime Network (PTCN) was established in 2002 to tackle the growing threats of drug trafficking and money laundering. Over time, cybercrime and environmental crime also emerged as significant threats. Through a network of 29 Transnational Crime Units in 21 jurisdictions coordinated by the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre in Samoa, the PTCN facilitates intelligence sharing, joint investigations and operational cooperation across the region. The AFP supports the PTCN through dedicated advisers and a secretariat based in Canberra.

In the 2010s, Australia continued to support this regional approach through initiatives including the AFP-led [Cyber Safety Pasifika](#) established in 2012 and the Transnational Serious Organised Crime (TSOC) [Pacific Taskforce](#) in 2019. But there is still an important role for bilateral police cooperation. Operation Weathers, a joint Australia-PNG investigation that thwarted an organised crime syndicate's attempt to traffic cocaine between the two countries in 2020, demonstrates the value of bilateral cooperation in responding to transnational crime (see [Box 2](#)).

Security cooperation often prevails despite broader political friction. For example, Australia's strategic competition with China has not prevented the two countries from cooperating through [Taskforce Blaze](#) to disrupt drug trafficking in the region.

Box 2. Operation Weathers

In July 2020, a light aircraft crashed while attempting to take off from a makeshift airstrip on the outskirts of Port Moresby carrying more than 500 kilograms of cocaine destined for Australia. It led to the [largest drug seizure in PNG history](#), with an estimated street value of around \$800 million at the time.

The [joint operation](#) between the AFP, other Australian law enforcement agencies and the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC) was known as Operation Weathers. It culminated in coordinated search warrants across both countries, leading to multiple arrests and prosecutions.

In 2024, four men in PNG were sentenced to between 18 and 19 years' imprisonment for their role in the conspiracy. In 2026, four members of a Melbourne-based criminal syndicate with alleged links to Italian organised crime were sentenced to a combined 54 years' imprisonment.

The stability face

Maintaining regional order and supporting peaceful, resilient societies.

Security and stability often go hand-in-hand when it comes to policing partnerships across the Pacific. While security cooperation focuses on disrupting crime, stability cooperation helps preserve public order, maintain confidence in institutions and support governments during times of crisis or periods of heightened tension. Over time, Australia's approach to stability has shifted from being reactive to crises towards greater investment in resilience initiatives designed to prevent escalation.

The defining example of Australia's contributions to stability in the region is the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). Established in 2003 following years of civil conflict and tension, RAMSI restored law and order and helped rebuild the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF). While primarily a stability effort at inception, the mission encompassed many other faces of international policing over its 14-year duration. Police diplomacy was vital throughout. Notably, AFP Commissioner Barrett was a young AFP officer [deployed](#) to Solomon Islands in 2003, and the experience shaped her career, her understanding of the region, and her approach to engaging with Pacific partners. Police from Pacific Island countries who participated in RAMSI also [reflected](#) on the mission's contribution to broader regional police cooperation through two-way learning and the forging of professional relationships.

RAMSI continued to evolve until its conclusion in 2017. Stability was eventually succeeded by development as the mission's primary focus, reflecting a shift from crisis response to capability building and conflict prevention. But the lessons learned from RAMSI on stability cooperation were highlighted in Solomon Islands only a few years later with the deployment of the [Solomon Islands International Assistance Force](#) (SIAF) in 2021. Rather than replacing the RSIPF, SIAF operated alongside it under the bilateral security treaty. A [similar approach](#) was adopted by the AFP to support Tonga following the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption in 2022.

Ongoing calls for a more collective approach to stability in the region were met with the establishment of the [Pacific Police Support Group](#) under the PPI. This standing multinational policing capability is designed to respond rapidly to a range of crises and other requests for assistance. Looking ahead, the PPSG has the potential to strengthen the coordination, responsiveness and effectiveness of policing contributions to stability operations in the region through the [Regional Operations Deployment Framework](#). The next step in the evolution of the stability face will likely depend on how policing capabilities are integrated with military and civil responses to regional crises. Beyond the region, Australia and its Pacific partners are also promoting a [sustainable training model](#) for UN police peacekeeping missions.

The development face

Strengthening policing institutions to improve public safety and the rule of law.

The development face reflects Australia's long-term investment in the region's law and justice institutions. For decades, Australia has supported the development of police services across the Pacific, helping to strengthen their capability, accountability and effectiveness. While this development role has been overshadowed in recent years as attention has shifted towards

geopolitics and broader regional capabilities and operations, it remains an important foundation of Australia's policing partnerships in the region.

The integration of policing into Australia's development program accelerated during the 1990s as governance emerged as a central pillar of Australian aid, before expanding substantially in the 2000s amid growing concerns about state fragility. What often began as technical assistance and specialist training has evolved into long-term [policing partnership programs](#) with many Pacific neighbours, encompassing leadership development, police infrastructure and organisational reform. Embedded advisers provide on-the-ground capability building and mentoring while also helping to identify priority areas for support.

In addition to bilateral policing partnership programs, the AFP supports a range of [regional capability development initiatives](#) and jointly manages the [Pacific Faculty of Policing](#) with the Australian Institute of Police Management. The PPI further reinforces this Pacific-wide development approach, particularly through the establishment of [Regional Centres of Excellence](#) in PNG, Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu.

Australia's long-term commitment to the development of Pacific police services underpins the success of many other faces of engagement. Without sustained investment in institutional strengthening, many of the recent advances in joint operations and Pacific-led stability responses would not have been possible. As Australia expands its strategic ambitions for regional police cooperation, it will be important not to lose sight of its development impact, including through more robust program evaluation, learning and adaptation.^v

The geopolitical face

Enhancing strategic influence and shaping the regional balance of power.

The geopolitical dimension of Australia's regional policing partnerships has become considerably more overt in recent years as the Australian Government has deployed all tools of statecraft in its contest for influence with China. In 2024, Australian Minister for the Pacific Pat Conroy stated that Australia had 'been consistent in [its] view that there is [no role for China](#) in policing, or broader security, in the Pacific'.

Australia's policing partnerships in the Pacific have always contributed to its broader national interests by reinforcing regional relationships and supporting a stable and secure region. However, since the late 2010s, they have increasingly been seen through a geopolitical lens, reflecting concerns about China's expanding influence in the region, including its growing policing presence (see [Box 3](#)) and military basing ambitions.

Particularly since the signing of the [China-Solomon Islands Security Agreement](#) in 2022, Australian policy has shifted towards negotiating bilateral security treaties with Pacific partners. While the provisions of these treaties vary, some effectively grant Australia veto power over other third-party engagement in the policing and security sectors. At a minimum, any new partnership signed with a Pacific nation since 2022 has reaffirmed Australia's position as a security 'partner of choice'. One of the more recent examples, the [Nakamal Treaty](#) signed with Vanuatu, states that 'Recognising Australia as Vanuatu's longstanding primary policing partner, Vanuatu shall prioritise any policing request to Pacific Islands Forum members.'

For the many Pacific Island countries without standing militaries, this elevates policing partnerships as the primary means of demonstrating Australia's role as a security 'partner of choice'. While these treaties encompass wider security cooperation, including financing, infrastructure and, in some cases, defence-related assistance, the policing component remains central to advancing shared security objectives in the region.

Regional initiatives, such as the PPI, have been [endorsed](#) by Pacific leaders because they support Pacific-owned and led security solutions, not because of strategic competition with China. Nevertheless, these initiatives have clear implications for the role of external partners that form part of Australia's own strategic calculus. It would be naïve to ignore the geopolitical face, but it is equally problematic to overlook the enduring contributions of the other faces of Australia's police cooperation in the Pacific.

Box 3. China's policing presence in the Pacific region

China's policing presence in the Pacific remains modest compared with Australia's, but it has [expanded significantly](#) over the past decade in both geographic reach and operational scope. Through bilateral policing agreements, Ministry of Public Security liaison teams, police advisers, equipment donations, training programs and operational deployments, Beijing has established policing relationships with several Pacific Island countries, most notably Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Vanuatu.

What began primarily as technical assistance and police training has evolved in some countries into embedded advisory relationships, joint patrols, criminal investigations and support for police infrastructure and surveillance capabilities. Although Australia remains by far the region's largest policing partner, Chinese policing cooperation has become an important component of Beijing's broader strategic engagement in the Pacific.

The principal concern for Australia and other 'traditional' policing partners in the region is not simply the presence of Chinese police, but the policing model they may introduce. Australia's model of policing [is by no means perfect](#) but aims to promote democratic principles with a community focus. In contrast, China's Ministry of Public Security operates within an authoritarian political system where policing is closely linked to regime security, surveillance and political control.

There are [risks](#) that Chinese policing assistance could normalise practices such as intrusive surveillance, extensive collection of personal and biometric data, opaque policing agreements, monitoring of Chinese diaspora communities, and policing approaches that prioritise state security over individual rights and community accountability. While Pacific governments retain sovereign authority over their policing arrangements, the model of policing adopted today may shape policing culture, governance and public trust for decades to come.

The governance face

Enabling collective action through regional policing architecture.

As noted earlier, Pacific leaders have increasingly called for [Pacific-owned and led solutions](#) to regional security challenges. Responding to this call, the governance face focuses on strengthening the regional institutions and mechanisms that enable Pacific police services to work together more effectively.

The [PICP](#) has been the cornerstone of regional policing governance for more than 50 years (initially as the South Pacific Chiefs of Police Conference), bringing together police commissioners from 22 jurisdictions to identify shared priorities and coordinate responses. Over the years, it has overseen many key regional initiatives that facilitate cooperation among its members, including the PTCN, the Women's Advisory Network (WAN), the Pacific Community for Law Enforcement Cooperation (PCLEC) and, more recently, the PPI.

This evolution reflects a broader shift in Australia's policing partnerships in the Pacific. Governance is no longer simply about coordinating activities between police services; it is about building the regional architecture that makes sustained cooperation possible. These governance arrangements provide the foundation upon which the other five faces increasingly depend, enabling Pacific police services to respond collectively to shared security threats, regional crises and emerging strategic challenges under Pacific leadership and ownership. Ongoing effort is required, however, to ensure that the AFP's Pacific counterparts remain genuine partners in shaping and implementing cooperative initiatives, consistent with Australia's commitment to a 'by the Pacific, for the Pacific' approach.

If realised, PACPOL would represent a further significant evolution of the governance face, bringing together the PICP and PPI in a unified regional policing model. It would also give Pacific police chiefs a stronger regional platform and collective voice at INTERPOL and other global policing forums. In her recent [address](#) to the United Nations, AFP Commissioner Barrett emphasised the importance of being 'ambitious together as the Pacific family' because 'Pacific Police Chiefs are too wise not to be heard'.

Three | Conclusion.

It is easy to see Australia's expanding police cooperation in the Pacific as a response to strategic competition with China, but this is a narrow view. Widen the lens and at least six faces of this cooperation emerge: diplomacy, geopolitics, security, stability, development and governance. The geopolitical face may have become more pronounced in recent years, but the others have deeper histories and enduring significance.

These faces are not mutually exclusive. Like a Rubik's Cube, they appear in constantly shifting combinations, with their relative prominence varying over time and across contexts. Any given policing partnership or initiative is likely to show several faces simultaneously. Often the faces are complementary, but they can also be in tension.

Different stakeholders also privilege particular faces, which has implications for how regional policing initiatives are designed and evaluated. Those privileging geopolitics, for example, might favour speed and strategic positioning, whereas those privileging development might emphasise sustainability and local ownership.

Recognising the distinct faces can bring greater rigour to the way police cooperation initiatives are conceived, communicated and implemented. Rather than reducing policing partnerships to a single strategic or operational objective, it enables a more complete assessment of the multiple, overlapping purposes they serve and how those purposes are prioritised. This supports more deliberate choices about which purposes matter more in different partnerships, and the trade-offs involved. It also provides a stronger basis for evaluating the effectiveness and associated risks of police cooperation.

This way of seeing—which has been likened to a [fox rather than a hedgehog](#)—can also assist in analysing other tools of statecraft. Recognising the multiple faces of development cooperation, for example, can help to [navigate the competing purposes of Australian development](#). Strategic competition may be intensifying, but there is far more at play in Australia's regional partnerships than geopolitics alone.

Development Intelligence Lab.

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ⁱ For an introduction to Pacific policing, see Danielle Watson et al, *Policing in the Pacific Islands*, ANU Press, 2023. In the context of the PPI, see also Nic MacLennan, *It's not just police who police*, Inside Story, 20 September 2024.

ⁱⁱ Anthea Roberts and Nicholas Lamp, *Six Faces of Globalization*, Harvard University Press, 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ While beyond the scope of this policy brief, there is a substantial body of scholarship on the risks associated with international policing, including concerns about legitimacy, accountability, corruption and human rights. See, for example, Ben Bowling and James Sheptycki, *Global Policing*, Sage, 2012.

^{iv} Ethan A Nadelmann, *Cops Across Borders*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993, 468.

^v See discussion in Cameron Hill, *Development with depth: (re)building Australia's aid capability*, Australian Journal of International Affairs, 12 March 2026, 4.