
CHINA SENDS TROOPS TO OPEN FIRST OVERSEAS MILITARY BASE IN DJIBOUTI

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Ships carrying personnel for China's first overseas military base, in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, have set sail to begin setting up the facility, as China's rapidly modernizing military extends its global reach.

Djibouti's position on the northwestern edge of the Indian Ocean has fuelled worry in India that it would become another of China's "string of pearls" of military alliances and assets ringing India, including Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

China began construction of a logistics base in Djibouti last year. It will be used to resupply navy ships taking part in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions off the coasts of Yemen and Somalia, in particular.

It will be China's first overseas naval base, though Beijing officially describes it as a logistics facility.

State news agency Xinhua said late on Tuesday the ships had departed from Zhanjiang in southern China "to set up a support base in Djibouti".

Navy commander Shen Jinlong "read an order on constructing the base in Djibouti", but the news agency did not say when the base would begin operations.

Xinhua said the establishment of the base was a decision made by the two countries after "friendly negotiations, and accords with the common interest of the people from both sides".

"The base will ensure China's performance of missions, such as escorting, peace-keeping and humanitarian aid in Africa and west Asia," it said.

"The base will also be conducive to overseas tasks including military cooperation, joint exercises, evacuating and protecting overseas Chinese and emergency rescue, as well as jointly maintaining security of international strategic seaways," Xinhua said.

Foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a daily news briefing the base would enable China to make "new and greater contributions" to peace in Africa and the world and would benefit Djibouti's economic development.

Djibouti, which is about the size of Wales, is at the southern entrance to the Red Sea on the route to the Suez Canal. The tiny, barren nation sandwiched between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia also hosts U.S., Japanese and French bases.

'Not Military Expansionism'

The People's Liberation Army Daily said in a front-page commentary the facility was a landmark that would increase China's ability to ensure global peace, especially because it had so many U.N. peacekeepers in Africa and was so involved in anti-piracy patrols.

China would not seek military expansionism or get into arms races no matter what happened, the newspaper said.

"These promises will not change because of the construction of the overseas logistics base," it said.

The state-run Global Times said in an editorial there could be no mistake that this was in fact a military base.

"Certainly this is the People's Liberation Army's first overseas base and we will base troops there. It's not a commercial resupply point. It makes sense there is attention on this from foreign public opinion," said the paper, which is published by the official People's Daily.

China's military development was about protecting its own security, it said.

"It's not about seeking to control the world."

There has been persistent speculation in diplomatic circles that China would build other such bases, in Pakistan for example, but the government has dismissed this.

Kaynak/Source: