

Horn of Africa: China to Open Its First Overseas Military Base in Djibouti

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The United States, Japan and France also have military bases there.

Ships carrying Chinese military personnel departed on Tuesday to set up China's first military base in Djibouti, state media reported.

Shen Jinlong, commander of the People's Liberation Army Navy, read an order on constructing the base in Djibouti and bestowed the military flag on the fleet at the departure ceremony, according to Xinhua news agency.

The report didn't specify the number of troops or ships that departed for Djibouti, nor when the base would start operations. China reportedly began construction last year.

Djibouti, a small country in the Horn of Africa, is favoured for its location as it is located at the southern entrance of the Red Sea on the route to the Suez Canal. The United States, Japan and France also have military bases in Djibouti.

Officially described as a logistics facility, the naval base will be used for China's performance of missions, such as escorting, peacekeeping and humanitarian aid in Africa and west Asia, Xinhua said.

It will also be used to for military cooperation, naval exercises and rescue missions.

Foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a daily news briefing that the establishment of the base was a decision made by the two countries after friendly negotiations and will be conducive to China's performance of international obligations.

"It also stimulates the social and economic development of Djibouti. It helps China to continue to make even greater contributions to the peace and stability of Africa and the rest of the world," Geng said.

China has deployed vessels to the Gulf of Aden and the waters off the Somali coast on escort missions since 2008. It also embarked on its first foreign peacekeeping mission in South Sudan in 2015.

"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," the *Global Times* said in an editorial.

But the "essential purpose of China's development of its military might is to protect 'China's safety', and is not about seeking to control the world," it said.

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