

# PAKISTAN IN DJIBOUTI

## CSSPR Policy Brief #6



THE  
UNIVERSITY OF  
LAHORE

# Playground of the superpowers: The foreign bases in Djibouti

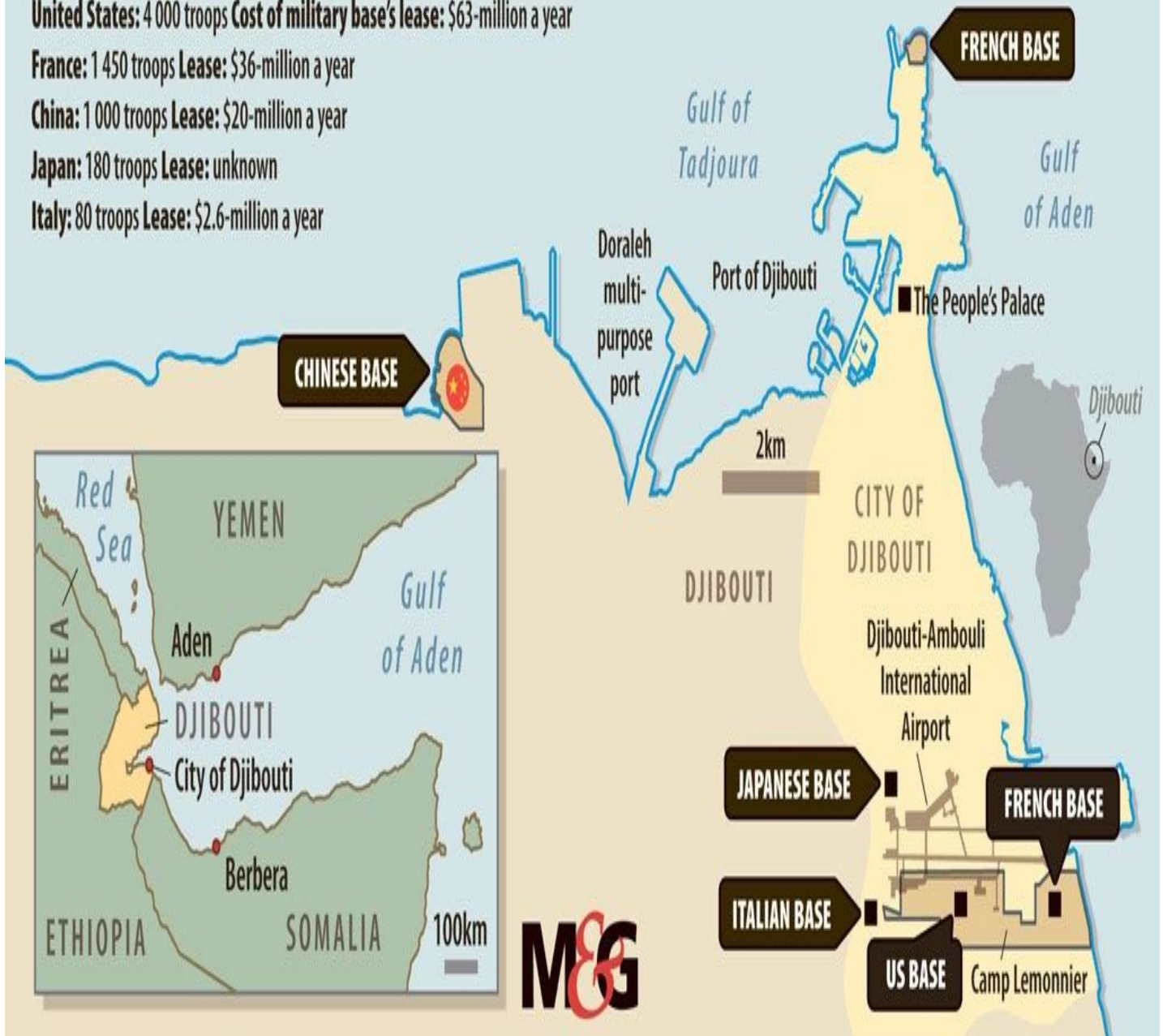
**United States:** 4 000 troops **Cost of military base's lease:** \$63-million a year

**France:** 1 450 troops **Lease:** \$36-million a year

**China:** 1 000 troops **Lease:** \$20-million a year

**Japan:** 180 troops **Lease:** unknown

**Italy:** 80 troops **Lease:** \$2.6-million a year



Source: Mail & Guardian

Pakistan's Engage Africa policy is bearing fruits. Pakistan's diplomatic footprint along with economic engagement and broader bilateral cooperation with African countries is a strategic move which was long awaited. Gateway to the Horn of Africa, Djibouti is strategically quite significant for Pakistan. By announcing the opening of Pakistan's diplomatic mission in Djibouti, both countries will not only establish bilateral relations to foster cultural and trade ties but also undertake defense cooperation. Djibouti currently hosts five military bases from the U.S, France, Italy, China and Japan. The U.S. base hosts British soldiers while the French naval base hosts the Germans and the Spanish soldiers. India and Japan have signed a reciprocal defense logistics pact (similar to the military logistics support agreements India has with the

U.S. and France) which will allow India to use Japanese naval base in Djibouti.

Sitting at the narrowest point in the Red Sea, Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, Djibouti links Asia and Europe, connecting the Suez Canal and the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. ["10 percent of oil exports and 20 percent of commercial goods](#) pass through the narrow strait right off Djibouti's coast on their way to and from the Suez Canal." The military presence of the U.S., U.K., France, Italy, Japan, Germany, Spain, Saudi Arabia and China in Djibouti has crowded this former colony of French Somaliland. Pakistan's time has come now and China can help this access.

China's first overseas military outpost in Djibouti aims to undertake primarily humanitarian and peacekeeping operations off the coasts of Yemen and Somalia.

Africa's biggest and deepest port, the Doraleh Port, has been built by China in Djibouti. As China expands its maritime security role, Pakistan can carve one for itself as it develops diplomatic presence in Djibouti.

Pakistan Navy made several goodwill port calls at Djibouti port in 2016, 2017 and 2018. But 2021 should be a step ahead from the goodwill already established between the two countries. **It should be about enhancing interoperability with the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) at the Chinese naval base in Djibouti.**

We recommend that Pakistan:

- a) should initiate **signing a basing and logistics agreement with China to use the Chinese naval base facilities in Djibouti. Such an agreement can enhance interoperability of the two**

**navies, facilitate the provision of services and supplies, provide a framework for bilateral training exercises, and encourage greater maritime cooperation.**

- b) should propose that in addition to conducting independent patrols, **PLAN undertake joint patrolling with the Pakistan Navy in the Gulf of Aden to counter the threat of piracy and provide assistance to China to secure its energy security routes.** The Gulf of Aden, due to its proximity to the crisis struck Yemen and Somalia, is more challenging for PLAN than the Strait of Malacca. A naval liaison office can be set up initially to develop trust between the two navies and to let the Chinese understand the value of our input. (As part of the [Combined Maritime Forces \(CMF\)](#), a multinational maritime partnership, Pakistan has

commanded CTF 151 along with other countries including Japan, Kuwait, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Turkey, Kuwait and USA and has extensive

experience in countering threats posed by non-state actors on the high seas.)

**By aligning its political, strategic and military interests with China at sea around East Africa, Pakistan can help China focus its energies towards countering the aggressive designs of the anti-China Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) of U.S., Japan, India and Australia in the Indian Ocean.**