

China, Djibouti forge 'strategic' ties

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Djibouti's visiting leader Omar Ismail Guelleh, whose African nation is hosting China's first overseas military base, agreed on Thursday to elevate their nations' diplomatic relations.

The two countries agreed to form a "strategic partnership" as Mr. Guelleh held talks with Mr. Xi at the imposing Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

China has described the base on the Horn of Africa, which opened in August, as "defensive in nature", saying it will provide support for naval escorts, UN peacekeeping, anti-piracy and evacuating Chinese nationals from the region in emergencies.

Mr. Xi said relations between the two countries exemplify "the solidarity and mutual assistance among developing countries." The Chinese leader thanked Mr. Guelleh for his congratulations sent after he was re-appointed head of the Communist Party last month.

"I am a great friend of China," Mr. Guelleh said. "I would like to recall the geostrategic place of Djibouti and its importance in this part of the world as an islet of stability and a crossroads of Asia, Africa and the West Asia."

'Growing influence'

The Chinese base is just a few kilometres from Camp Lemonnier, the United States' only permanent base in Africa.

A Pentagon report said the strategically-sited camp, "along with regular naval vessel visits to foreign ports, both reflects and amplifies China's growing influence, extending the reach of its armed forces."

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