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<http://www.thenational.ae/world/africa/china-in-talks-with-djibouti-on-establishing-logistics-base>

China in talks with Djibouti on establishing logistics base

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China said on Thursday it is in talks with Djibouti about setting up a naval logistics centre in the Horn of Africa nation to service Chinese antipiracy patrols, raising the sensitive issue of whether Beijing will seek military bases overseas.

China currently has no foreign military bases and has consistently said in the past it would not seek them. When asked on Thursday whether the plans amounted to a military base like those maintained by the US, Britain and others, Chinese defence ministry spokesman Wu Qian declined to say. He referred to the logistics centre as “facilities.”

Mr Wu said China hopes the centre could ease difficulties in refuelling and replenishing Chinese navy ships and provide recreation for officers and sailors taking part in antipiracy missions in the Gulf of Aden. China has sent more than 60 ships to the waters of the coast of Somali on 21 separate missions since December 2008.

“In performing their escort missions lots of practical difficulties have been encountered,” Mr Wu told reporters at a monthly news briefing.

The logistics centre “will play a positive role for the Chinese armed forces to effectively fulfil its international obligations and maintain international and regional peace and stability,” Mr Wu said.

Along with the antipiracy patrols, China has committed troops to regional UN peacekeeping missions in South Sudan, Mali and elsewhere. Mr Wu said the logistics centre could also aid in China’s disaster relief and humanitarian assistance missions.

Strategically located Djibouti, with a population of less than 1 million, already hosts the headquarters of the US Africa Command’s Combined Joint Task Force — Horn of Africa. Former colonial ruler France also maintains a large military presence there.

China’s growing economic, diplomatic and military engagement is testing the country’s strict policy against foreign military interventions. The recent deaths of four Chinese citizens at the hands of militants in Syria and Mali have placed president Xi Jinping in a quandary as to how to respond.