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PRO GRADU THESIS

**China's Changing Role in the New Era**

**A case study based on China's first overseas military base in  
Djibouti**

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China's foreign policy has been radically changing from the position of passive observer to active policy participant. This change can be examined in various ways through China's actions in bilateral relations, world politics and multilateral institutions. China's changing foreign policy is well researched and highly disputed. With this thesis the objective is to further elaborate these changes as well as participate in the wider discussion over China's foreign policy. The study partakes in the discussion through a detailed case study based on China's first overseas military base in Djibouti. The case study answers the research questions of how does China reason the opening of the military base in Djibouti and how the reasons portray the changes of China's foreign policy and finally what sort of implications does the opening have for the future.

The study was conducted as a case study which supported open-minded and objective viewpoint for analysis. Official Ministry of Foreign Affairs press statements and People's Daily and Global Times news articles were chosen as primary data. In total there were around ten official statements from Ministry of Foreign Affairs and 55 news articles from People's Daily and Global Times. Due to both of the primary sources being strictly under the rule of China's Communist Party, the data provided insightful glance on China's foreign policy. Data was further analyzed by using content analysis to highlight and discover themes and connections with the current foreign policy.

The data suggests that while opening a military base is a new step on China's security policy, the reasoning follows China's well-established themes of non-interference and peaceful development. While at times contradicting, it seems unlikely that China is abandoning neither of these policies, but the terms' meanings are developing and changing. It is likely that in the future the needs of People's Liberation Army and China's foreign policy drift further away from each other which will cause a stir. While Chinese base in Djibouti is unique in many ways, it can be seen as only testing ground for future military bases.

Keywords: China, foreign policy, international relations, military base, Djibouti, Africa

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## 1. Introduction

After Chairman Mao's death in 1976, with the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China launched its first economic reforms and started the opening of the country for the rest of the world. Since then, the economy of the world's most populous country has blossomed in unimaginable ways and succeeded to lift 850 million people out of absolute poverty (World Bank 2019). The success of China's economy has not only benefited China itself, but also the rest of the world (Golley & Song 2011, 1). China's vast, ever-growing market opportunities as well as the low-cost products and workforce are attractive and lucrative for the world economy. While China's economy has blossomed, it has also gained considerable economic and political power through its vast diplomatic relations around the world and especially with its connections to developing nations. While China's transition from one of the world's poorest countries to economic powerhouse has been on-going, China's stance on foreign policy and its relative position in the world politics has become more assertive.

While China's economic achievements are commendable and necessary for the global economy to progress, at the same time country's control over its own citizens is tighter than ever. Free internet, that was predicted to bring democracy and human rights to China, is under strict censorship and anyone who is found to be criticizing government too publicly is facing possible prosecution (Griffiths 2020). For the fear of unrests, Chinese government has decided to surveil and restrict the movement and livelihoods of the ethnic minorities of Tibetans and Uyghurs (Harris 2019, 276-277). In addition, according to numerous reports China has detained over one million ethnic Uyghurs to so called detention centers that work as reeducation centers where Uyghurs are forced to make confessionals, tortured and kept under constant surveillance (e.g. Maizland 2019 & Harris 2019). These minorities' freedom of religion, speech, language and movement is constantly weakening. In addition, Chinese human rights lawyers and advocates have disappeared and trialed without fair judgement (UN Human Rights Council 2020). Many western nations have been criticizing the situation of human rights in China, but no real actions have been taken against China due to fear of possible diplomatic dispute with China.

During the time, China has also initiated vigorous reforms to modernize the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Reforms have not been limited to organizational changes, but also extensive investments have been made to develop armament and particularly its navy. In a mere decade, China's ability to develop and enlarge its navy has been nothing sort of astonishing (Rick 2020). As an example, some of the PLA Navy's (PLAN) greatest achievements have been the release of two aircraft carriers within decade which itself is unseen before.

Concurrently, China has been more vocal than ever about its disputes with neighboring countries and military advancements. Tensions have risen in the South China Sea since China commenced building permanent military and civilian installations on the reefs and rocks of the areas which fall between China's so called nine-dash line which are also claimed by multiple different countries. China's nine-dash line refers to vague area in the South China Sea that China claims sovereignty over. The area covers almost the entire South China Sea crossing over to neighboring countries' borders. Reclaiming land and building on the reefs and later imposing control over them has angered not only neighboring countries but international audience as well (e.g. Roy 2013, Schofield 2016 & De Castro 2012). In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in Haag ruled in the case of Philippines vs. China that China's claims were all groundless. China refused to participate in tribunal process and later dismissed the ruling (Permanent Court of Arbitration 2016, 2). At present, none of the disputes between China and neighboring countries involved has been solved and negotiations have come to a standstill. Despite condemnation of the countries involved and the international audience, China is still pursuing its goals in the South China Sea and continuing reclaiming and constructing on the reefs.

Similar incidents have been also observed in the East China Sea, where China is conducting aggressive patrolling around Senkaku Islands (in China known as Diaoyu) which are controlled by Japan. This essentially means Chinese government ships entering Japan's national waters without permission. Besides conventional patrolling in the area, Chinese fishing boats frequently enter Japanese waters to fish (Sato 2019, 61). Sometimes the boats are accompanied by Chinese coast guards to assert their rights in the areas of dispute. In addition, China announced the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in 2013 which overlaps partly with Japanese own ADIZ and

has contributed to dispute. The announcement of China's ADIZ is clearly showing a stronger stance against border disputes (Chang 2019, 46).

Finally, in 2015 China announced the decision to establish its first overseas military base in Djibouti. This plan to open military base did not astound the world as speculations over the possible opening had been circulating around, albeit the decision was met with a mixed response. For some, a military base signifies a step toward claiming a position as military power, which China has denied furiously (People's Daily 2016c & Sun 2017). Djibouti leaders, on the other hand, embrace China's decision to follow peaceful development path and take it as a welcome change to Western powers present in Djibouti (Bai 2016 & Global Times 2015a). As a result of all the above-mentioned Chinese advancements, many describe the new Chinese foreign policy "assertive", "arrogant" and even "aggressive" (Chang 2019, 32). China's inability to convince the international audience of its intentions has led to vast conversations on "China threat" and "rising China" not only within Western media but also among academia all around the world (Machida 2010 and Golley & Song 2011). While China develops it is only natural to see changes, it is only natural and expected to see its foreign policy change and further develop. All the major superpowers have gone through multiple changes in their foreign policy through time, and so will China as well.

Much have already been written about the changes in Chinese foreign policy but with this thesis I wish to add to the conversation by conducting a case study based on the establishment of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti. With the case study, I want to illustrate the reasons China has given for opening the overseas military base. I also elaborate how the establishment reflects the current changes in policies and how the military base is now essential part of China's foreign policy. The chosen primary data is drawn from the official statements made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China and the news articles from the main organs of the Chinese party-state: the People's Daily and the Global Times.

This thesis will introduce the results of this study in the following chapters: 1. Introduction, 2. Research design, methodology and data, 3. China's African Policy, 4. Analysis, 5. Discussion and 6. Conclusion. In chapter 1, the topic and the research questions are being introduced while China-Djibouti history will also be highlighted getting. In chapter 2 a closer look of how the study was conducted will be taken and the

main methodology will be introduced. There will be also introduction of the primary sources. In chapter 3 the main parts of China's African Policy are being discussed. In chapter 4 findings of the study will be presented under three distinctive themes and following subcategories. Chapter 5 discusses the concluding analysis results in more detail and the results of the study. Chapter 6 will be the concluding chapter that summarizes the study and the study results.

### **1.1 China's past and current foreign policies**

Shortly after Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 Deng Xiaoping gave the following advice regarding diplomatic relations: "keep cool-headed to observe, stand firmly, be composed to react. Hide our light and bide our time, never try to take the lead" "隐藏实力，等待时机，绝不当头". This advice became widely cited and is often stated to describe the essence of Chinese foreign policy stand starting from Mao's era (1949-1979) until 2012 and Party leadership by Xi Jinping. This period of China's foreign policy is often interpreted as more passive and observer-like era. Chinese leaders remained largely loyal to Deng's ideology until Hu Jintao's era (2002-2012), but even then, Western countries requests for positive action were often met with "non-committal" responses (Ferdinand 2016, 942). During this "hibernation" period of Chinese foreign policy, Western countries and especially the United States remained the major force in all the international institutions and discussions.

Nonetheless, since 2012 new winds of change have been observed in China's domestic and foreign policies. 2012 marks as a significant year as this is the year when current Party General Secretary Xi Jinping took office. At the time, many predicted that Xi would bring more open China and more rights to its citizens (e.g. McGregor 2017, 3-4). Reality has been much different, and China is now more controlled and closed than ever before. Soon after Xi took office, he launched the "China dream" "中国梦" as the ideological objective of his regime. Albeit, China dream was not originally initiated by Xi himself, he brought it officially as part of the party discourse (Ferdinand 2016, 944). It is applied to refer to both Chinese people's dreams and more significantly to the "rejuvenation of Chinese people and China" (兴国) as a whole. From the Chinese government's point of view, China dream has two objects, which are to become "moderately well-off society" by around 2020 and modernize and transform China into

a fully developed nation by around 2050 (Mohanty 2013, 34). Modernization refers here as “China re-establishing its position as a world leader in science and technology as well as in economics and business; the resurgence of Chinese civilization, culture and defensive strength; and China participating in all areas of human endeavor” (Kuhn, 2014). As development and revamping have swept through all the areas of Chinese society and government, changes have also been made to country’s foreign policy. These changes are the primary focus of this thesis and how they are reflected in the opening of China’s first overseas military base.

Before getting more into the Chinese foreign policies, it is important to understand the current situation of the world politics. Since the end of World War II, the United States has been indisputably the most powerful nation in the world in terms of military, finance and economy. Following the years of war, the United States capitalized its position as the most powerful by creating system that underpins postwar international order. This happened through creating international institutions such as the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, which support the current world order. All these institutions were created and mainly governed by the United States with other Western nations (Shambaugh 2017, 142).

The Great Recession of 2007-2008 that shook global economy to the core did not end the unipolarity of the United States but was the start of its declining economic power. In addition, during more recent years the United States’ decisions to step away from positions of power have left a vacancy for many rising countries. US president Donald Trump’s decisions to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Council can be stated as clear examples of the US withdrawal of major international bodies. All the above mentioned have left power vacuum and more room for other countries to rise. (Layne 2018, 91-94.) All these point to the decline of Western influence and power in the field of foreign policy.

Due to Xi’s envisioned dream of more powerful China and newly acquired confidence through economic accomplishments, China’s foreign policy has entered a new era of confidence and this has also spilled over to the rhetoric surrounding it (Ferdinand 2016, 948-949). In connection to China’s new foreign policy objectives, China has launched its most ambitious plan yet, the so-called Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), “一帶一路”.

BRI aims to enhance connectivity through Asia, Europe, Africa and Middle East by investing in large scale development and infrastructure projects. Today over 100 countries and international institutions have joined the initiative. BRI is connected ideologically to historical Silk Road, but it is not geographically constrained, which means that in substance any country is welcomed to join the initiative. Ambitious plan will demand years to accomplish but China promises win-win benefits for all participating parties. (Mobley 2019, 52-53.)

Despite the lack of coherence and clear motives, BRI did not appear by chance but through strategic planning. Chinese economic growth has considerably slowed down from the economic growth heydays of two digits down to more normal one-digit growth. Despite the continuous economic success, China needs more to develop further and maintain the system, and the growth especially needed to reinvigorate some not less successful parts of China's economy. In fact, China's large state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have started to feel the pressure and fall behind. For decades SOEs have been given preferential treatment by government in decision making and preferential access to loans that have given unfair advantage compared to private companies (Li 2020, 197). The result is massive, complex web of unprofitable companies that play central role in providing employment locally in China. The closure of SOEs would bring unrest that local governments do not want to face (Li 2020, 192). Chinese government has been trying to privatize some of these companies, though it seems far more complicated than expected. SOEs are used also as a leverage tools when Chinese government wants to control economic fluctuations to more favorable direction. In order to sustain SOEs future, government has been passing large infrastructure projects to SOEs but as China moves from an investment led economy to a consumption based one, SOEs need to find alternative investment projects to domestic projects (Ferdinand 2016, 951). BRI projects are providing fitting alternative solution for declining domestic profits. Secondly, some suggest that China is using BRI investments to diversify its energy sources which is important for China's overall security (Mobley 2019, 55). Diversifying and securing energy sources is important for China because it will lessen its reliance energy sources dominated by the United States' allies.

Due to the initiative's vastness and lack of clear motives, the initiative has faced harsh criticism. The most common criticism being the way BRI projects are conducted in developing countries, that do not support the growth of these countries. Also, many of

the countries have found themselves in contracts that they are unable to keep, which has led to not only economic losses but also to loss of resources and other strategic assets (e.g. Magnus 2018, 183). This is discussed in more detail in chapter 3. Despite the criticism, many of the BRI partner countries have been welcoming for Chinese investments that have helped them to start already long due infrastructure projects that some of the countries have desperately needed. BRI projects are the foundation of Xi Jinping's current foreign policy and many actions of the country are connected to BRI. As it stands, BRI can be seen as a sort of umbrella that covers all of China's activities overseas. BRI's lack of coherence and definition allows it to flexibly apply BRI to everything it does. Through BRI China aims to improve its economic, political and security situation while developing win-win co-operation with foreign countries.

## **1.2 Djibouti and the first Chinese overseas military base**

Djibouti is a small Eastern African country that lies in the Horn of Africa. With the population of only 885 000, Djibouti is one of the smallest countries in the African continent. With little resources and industry, Djibouti has utilized its geological position to its benefit. The Horn of Africa is a geopolitically significant area due to its close proximity to the Gulf of Aden and the Suez Canal. Around 20 % of global trade goes through these sea routes every year (Eunafor 2019, 14). Thus, the Gulf of Aden is a significant waypoint between Europe, Africa, Middle East and beyond. Djibouti has three official languages: Somali, Arabic and French. As many neighboring African nations, Djibouti is a former French colony. Until country's independence in 1977, Djibouti was known as French Territory of the Afars and the Issas, named after the two main ethnic groups in the country. Djibouti has a harsh climate and very little natural minerals and resources. Country's agriculture sector is small to non-existing and periodic droughts have major impact on the country. As a result, the majority of food, water and energy must be imported from overseas. There are also no major industries present in Djibouti which has led the Djibouti government to rely entirely on their service sector to provide income and jobs for Djiboutians. Despite recent years' large investments and subsequent economic growth, Djibouti still has an unemployment rate of 40 % and most of the population is mainly unskilled with no formal education (Embassy of Djibouti in Washington). Djibouti's society is highly unequal and segregated by ethnic division where the rich and powerful elite prosper (Antinelli 2019, 35).



*Figure 1. Map of Horn of Africa. Image from Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland*

Country's largest economic asset is its geological location, and as mentioned before, Djibouti has capitalized on it to its benefit. Djibouti's strategy has been to transform itself to one of the world's leading international transport hubs. Djibouti's president Ismail Omar Guelleh famously said that "we want to follow the path of Singapore" in order to create commercial hub of Africa to Djibouti (Blair 2016). To achieve this, Djibouti has co-operated with China, whose interests align with Djibouti's. Country provides services both as a transit port and also as an export and import port. In addition, in order to gain revenue Djibouti hosts military bases of the United States, China, Italy, France and Japan. While French base also hosts groups from Germany and Spain (Dahir, 2017). According to media reports, also Saudi Arabia has started negotiations with Djibouti to open a new military base in Djibouti (Aglionby 2017). Collected rental payments of foreign military bases are important to country's economy and make substantial part of Djibouti's yearly 2-billion-dollar budget. Although exact numbers are not revealed for general public, reportedly the United States pays annually 70 million dollars, while China pays 20 million dollars as rental payments.

In the spring of 2019, China and Djibouti celebrated 40 years of formal diplomatic relations. Albeit countries having diplomatic relations since the 1980's, their

significance did not come into play until 2010s when China and Djibouti started closer economic co-operation. Since then, Djibouti has concluded a number of multibillion infrastructure projects. In 2017, Djibouti concluded two large infrastructure projects: the Doraleh multipurpose port, and Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway line, which were financed and constructed with a help of China. Both projects were part of China's *One Belt One Road* initiative and are significant for Djibouti's development and economy. Albeit the importance and urgent need of the projects, Djibouti has accumulated substantial debt due to these projects, which according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will increase Djibouti's public debt to 104% of its GDP by the end of 2018 (IMF, 2018). There is also growing concerns over Djibouti's economy as the debt is 77 % owned by China or Chinese state-owned enterprises (Eom, Brautigam & Benabdallah 2018, 4). If Djibouti is unable to pay, the consequences might put fractions between China and Djibouti.

### **1.3 First overseas military base**

In March 2015, China evacuated 522 Chinese and foreign civilians from Yemen due to worsening security situation (Hua, 2015). This was the largest evacuation operation China has conducted in foreign land and at the time the civilians were rescued through Djibouti. The rescue operation was successful and widely reported on Chinese media. Incident has enforced Chinese public's sentiment that Chinese government is responsible for protecting their own citizens also outside the country's borders. Thus, despite the successful evacuation, the PLA has faced many practical challenges in the region and a more solid operation point was needed.

Already by the end of 2015 China's Foreign Ministry admitted that the negotiations had been opened between China and Djibouti to establish the first Chinese military base in Djibouti (Hong 2015). Only a year later in February 2016, the construction of the base had been initiated. The military base was officially launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2017 when the opening was celebrated in conjunction with the PLA's founding day (Xinhua 2017). Initially, many western media outlets speculated and criticized the decision to open military base in Djibouti. Despite the criticism among western media, none of the foreign countries have officially protested to China (Bai 2016). Albeit, some media reports stated that the United States was "blindsided" when discussing the possible new opening of the Chinese military base (Jacobs & Perlez 2017).

After the opening, the Chinese military base has not been without controversies. Despite the initial statements stating that the PLA will not conduct any military exercises on the base and that the base is purely for nonmilitary activities, the PLA has conducted multiple military exercises on the site (Su, 2017 & People's Daily, 2018a). According to the PLA, exercises have been conducted to test and prepare troop's combat readiness. Soon after opening of the base the United States claimed China was using powerful lasers to distract their pilots (Lee Myers, 2018). After the incident, the United States claimed two pilots got minor injuries, while China refuted the claims entirely. Another incident occurred, when China claimed that Japanese military divers had approached a Chinese naval vessel. The incident was never officially confirmed by either side (Lo 2017).

#### **1.4 Research questions and the relevance of the research**

China's future role and changing position in the world politics can be seen being discussed everywhere. Some are celebrating the long-awaited change to Western dominated world order (e.g. Mahubani et al 2009), while some are fearful and worried about possible effects on power politics (e.g. Roy 2013 & Pan 2004). Theories, of what will happen once China "claims its rightful position" or will it ever happen, are debated vigorously (e.g. Zhang 2011 & Shambaugh 2017).

During the 4 years that I spend living in China and reading local papers on weekly basis, local Chinese media have left me with a strong impression of how China might want it to be seen and what sort of goals it has for the future. However, in order to further deepen this knowledge and the first task was to narrow down and find an interesting angle of the topic. Amid the initial stages, I found myself asking questions like "how can the change be observed?" as well as "how and where can it be observed?". The questions led to discovering China's African policy and eventually to China's military base in Djibouti. With China's non-interference policy in mind, the Djibouti base is an interesting case considering how it tests the limits of China's foreign policy principles, and at the same time it illustrates how China navigates through the inevitable conflicting response especially from Western countries. The non-interference policy will be explained in more detail in chapter 3. Despite the vast intrigue over China's changing foreign policy, the newly opened military base is still largely unresearched which gave an

excellent opportunity to find a unique angle for this study and further add to the wider discussion of China's changing position in the world.

I argue that the establishment of China's first military base in Djibouti can be described as decisive point in China's foreign policy development and it will most certainly have implications for future. As the base has been operational only for few years, a little is known about the exacts of the base. However, its significance to China's foreign policy is unparalleled as the military base is now active part of China's foreign policy and a part of Belt and Road Initiative. With this research I want to answer to three research questions to better understand how China's military base has become an integral part of China's foreign policy and how it portrays changes in China's foreign policy.

Firstly, I want to answer the question of how China reasons the opening of the military base. While keeping in mind China's current non-interference policy, reasoning behind the establishment is vital to understanding of China's move to open the base. Reasoning is to be expected to support China's key policy, but the mere existence of the base implies a change in foreign policy. Or, by opening the military base, China could be choosing an entirely different direction by distancing itself from the non-interference policy. The reasons China gives for its first overseas military base play a key role in elaborating how China wants world to see itself and what kind of message it wants to convey. Breaking down the Chinese official statements into themes will reveal the different stories China wants to convey to readers. Secondly, after breaking down and discovering the reasons, I want to answer how does China's reasoning portray change in its foreign policy. When a decade ago it would have been inconceivable for China to open a military base, now it is more probable to see many new military bases to open in the near future. As the actual military base works as a test site for PLA for future bases, so it is also an experimental site for Chinese foreign policy makers to see how the world reacts to the opening before China starts to further open new bases around the region. Lastly, it is explored if the military base has any implications for future.

## **2. Research design, methodology and data**

Choosing your source for primary data is crucial part of the research. If resources are chosen hastily, the results might not bring the wished answers. After choosing the resource, it is similarly vital to choose a fitting method to collect the data. In this chapter, the primary sources are introduced. Also, the chosen methodology and research design are being explained to illustrate why certain sources were chosen. Lastly, it will be discovered how content analysis was utilized during the process of this study to analyze the data.

### **2.1. Introducing primary sources**

When choosing the topic for this thesis, it was intended from the beginning to utilize the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' official statements as a primary source. The Ministry's spokespeople hold press conferences almost daily, during which media representatives can ask questions concerning China's foreign policies, current domestic affairs and opinions of China of international affairs. After these press conferences, the Ministry releases transcribes the press statements on their official website for further distribution. The releases are published not only in Chinese and English, but also in Russian, Spanish and Arabic. As the transcriptions are stored on the Ministry's official website, they can be freely accessed by the public without any special permission.

At the moment there are three senior officials who are giving the statements (MFA n.d). According to their CV's, all of the spokespersons' have distinguished and long careers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA 2012, MFA 2016b & MFA 2020). As the voice of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they have important role in bringing forth the voice of China to the world. As the spokesperson voice out the direct opinions of the Chinese leadership, the statements value should be recognized. Often, compared to the statements made by China's highest leadership, Ministry press releases provide much more candid picture of China's views on current affairs. At times, the voiced views of the personnel are rather direct and even controversial. Such case happened in March 2020, when newly appointed new Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian tweeted statement speculating that Covid-19 was brought to Wuhan by United States military (BBC 2020). Zhao's statement provoked Twitter to post notification under his statement to inform the public about possible fake news.

For supplementing the Ministry's statements, two media sources were chosen. The People's Daily (人民日报, Renmin Ribao) is China's largest media outlet, which publishes its content in seven minority languages as well as in nine foreign languages (People's Daily Online, n.d). On their official website, the People's Daily introduces itself as being "among the most influential and authoritative newspapers in China" (Liang, 2018). Like many newspapers in China, the People's Daily is owned by the Communist Party of China (CCP) and due to the close ties with the CCP it is considered to be the direct mouthpiece of the party (Lee, 2015). People's Daily and Xinhua are considered to be the "twin pillars" of the Party media which are guided by CCP and carry similar tone of events when concerned with CCP (Xin 2006, 51).

The Global Times on the other hand, is a much smaller newspaper in terms of circulation, but it is one of China's largest English language newspapers. On their website, the Global Times promises not to stray away from sensitive issues and describes itself as "a major English newspaper in the nation" (Global Times, n.d). Rawnsley (2015) describes the Global Times as one of the three major English language newspapers, which writes about China from a Chinese perspective. Western media often considers the Global Times as a nationalist newspaper with raunchy views on world politics (South China Morning Post n.d). According to South China Morning Post article while Global Times is strictly connected to People's Daily and CCP but as a subsidiary paper it can publish more freely about controversial topics (ibid). Global Times also covers many military related topics with a special attention to military weaponry advancements.

In the end, both of the news sources are directly under CCP and in many ways present China's official line of policy. In combination with the official statements from Ministry of Foreign Affairs these resources complement each other and provide meaningful source for this study.

## **2.2. Case Study Approach**

When taking on such a challenging and multidimensional topic as China's foreign policy, one might wonder how it is possible to narrow it down and discover insights into the topic. In order to find a more refined focus for this topic a case study approach was

chosen as the research design. Case study is a suitable method of research for this topic due to its open angle, yet at the same time structured approach to conducting research. Case study as a research design supports the whole research project immensely.

Yin defines a case study as being an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear (Yin 2009, 18). Almost all scientific fields use case studies in some way, and thus it is hard to clearly define due to its different uses. According to Erikson & Koistinen (2005, 4) maybe the only common ground to all these fields are 'case or cases' themselves, which are aimed to be defined, analyzed and answered. Erikson & Koistinen (2005, 7) argue that the definition of case study can be conducted as long as the case can be clearly separated from the rest of the context (historical background, industry, political environment and so forth) it will be plausible as a case. Erikson & Koistinen (2005) use a family owned Finnish bakery as an example. In their study when conducting a research about a certain company or organization is not suitable to include the entire company as a focus but rather than it should just focus on one unit or aspect of it (Erikson & Koistinen 2005, 7 - 8). This way it will much give a much deeper insight into particular topic. To summarize, a case can be something concrete or more of an abstract phenomenon, but what truly establishes the case study is how it is defined.

In this study, a sufficient amount of time was applied when defining the case, while also paying close attention when searching for an angle on how to approach the topic. Conclusively, the definition surfaced naturally due the topic's nature and sensitivity, which has limitations to how much information can be acquired through public sources. In this study, the case is defined as China's military base in Djibouti. As a case, it can be clearly defined and due to the limitations of information there is no difficulty in limiting the information acquired.

Besides the critical definition of 'case', also the research questions need to be considered when opting for a case study. In a case study, research questions often start with either "how" or "why" (Yin 2009, 4). In this study, the aim is to discover how does China reason the opening of its first overseas military base and how does this portray the changes in China's foreign policy. Thus, the study fills the requirements of case study research. Nevertheless, to further clarify, this research should not be confused

with any military studies, where one would estimate the operational capacity, or such based on the specifics of the base. Such specifics as manpower, armament or similar subjects are not the focus of this research. These kinds of “details” do offer certain insights to understanding the military base in its entirety, but they do not concern this thesis.

One common misconception regarding the case study is to confuse it with being merely a data collection method, when it is in fact a research strategy that guides the research from the beginning to end. The principle idea behind case study research is to gather as much information as possible to comprehensively understand the topic of research, but the method of doing so varies between different research projects. It is also common to combine various methods within a single research project. This could mean, for example, collecting survey answers and later supplementing them with interviews. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are being used in case study research even though in the social sciences, qualitative methods are more commonly used. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the use of only one type of primary data source prevents a research project from being defined as a case study.

### **2.3. Collecting primary data**

In order to find relevant articles, a simple search toolbar command was used for each statement release and website. Essentially, this would bring out all the articles related to the keyword being used, whether the word would be in the title or within the article itself. Before starting the actual data collection, several “test searches” were conducted to see the possible results. After the test phase was completed, a conscious decision was made to limit the keyword to “Djibouti”. Djibouti as a keyword choice proved to bring the largest amount of relevant texts. While it might seem simple, optimizing the results was vital for the success of collecting all the relevant data. Unsurprisingly, this also meant that during the data collection period, large quantities of irrelevant articles would appear in the searches from topics, such as economy, culture, etc. Nevertheless, Djibouti is a rather small country which is normally not covered extensively in the media, thus the amount of “not relevant” texts were still be manageable, and it did not extensively complicate the search for primary sources.

As mentioned earlier, at the beginning of the research the intention was to use solely the official ministry spokespeople’s statements, however while going through the releases,

it appeared that the amount of statements would be insufficient. Also, the access to Ministry of National Defense's similar press statements was not possible. The decision to add the People's Daily and the Global Times as new sources of primary data was a natural step for this research and proved to be fruitful. The goal of the data collection was to find all the possible articles related to the topic from these three different sources. In the end, ten statements from the Ministry press releases, 27 news articles from the People's Daily and 25 articles from the Global Times were gathered altogether. These add up to roughly 40 pages of text for analysis. Resources were collected from over three-year period starting from the early 2015 until end of October 2018.

#### **2.4. Qualitative content analysis**

After retrieving all the necessary material for the study, the next natural step was to start the analysis. For analyzing the data, qualitative content analysis was chosen as a suitable method for analysis. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002, 117), content analysis is a method that enables a researcher to analyze documents systematically and objectively. The aim of this method is to get a compressed and generalized description of the research phenomenon (Tuomi & Arajärvi 2002, 117).

Generally, content analysis research has been divided into two categories: theory-driven content analysis, which relies on pre-determined theories, models or concepts to analyze the data, and data-driven content analysis which aims to create its own theoretical units. Previous observations, theories and information should not have any influence on the results of analysis, because the analysis is presumed to be data driven. In this thesis, the data-driven approach is applied in order to acquire unique results. Data-driven analysis does not come without its own downsides, as it is hard to distinguish what observations are purely "objective" as a person's background and thoughts on the topic indisputably guide the researcher. The problem can be minimized by acknowledging the theories that help the analysis but are not bound by them. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 108-110.)

Researcher Timo Laine (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002, 104) suggests that qualitative content analysis proceeds in four simple stages, which are: gathering the data, going through data and marking the essential parts, categorizing it, and the summary. This is merely a simplification of the whole process, but it illustrates how content analysis is normally executed. The analysis part of this thesis has followed Laine's suggested "path" of qualitative content analysis.

According to Tuomi and Arajärvi (2002, 105), during the second stage the data is carefully processed under a strict microscope and all the interesting parts, with relevance to the research question, are marked. During this stage, I simply printed out all the data and underlined all the significant parts with different colors. This enabled me to better determine if the data answered my research question as well as enabled me to more closely familiarize myself with the data. Tuomi and Arajärvi (2002, 104) also state that the second stage is imperative as all the unnecessary data will be cut out and only relevant parts of the research are left for further analysis.

At the time of the third phase, I used different colors to signify different themes. According to Tuomi and Arajärvi (2002, 107), thematizing means finding views that correlate with imagined themes. At first, the colored underlining was used to create multiple subcategories. Later on, these subcategories were placed and grouped under larger themes. Great amount of time was spent on thematizing as this can be seen as the pillar of the analysis and thus highly important. This included going back to the data multiple times, shifting different components of material and changing names of the themes multiple times to better correspond the set goals of this study. Constant reviewing and shifting of components assured that the best possible outcome was achieved. Due to the constant reviewing and analyzing some components that were deemed important in the beginning of the analysis process was cut out later due to a newfound better understanding of the topic. In the last part of the analysis process conclusions were drawn from the processed and encoded data. Analyzing and organizing data to comprehensible text with relevant references was challenging but the results can be described satisfactory.

### 3. China's Africa policy

In the following chapter, the most relevant parts of China's Africa policy for this study are being introduced. China's Africa policy is a comprehensive policy that extends to variety of different areas of co-operation extending from security matters to agriculture, education and media. The most notable aspect of China's policy has been its somewhat unorthodox and aggressive trade policy and specifically noticeable has been the investments on Africa's infrastructure and energy sectors under the umbrella of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While economic ties between China and Africa are indisputably the core basis of China-Africa relations, it would be unwise to underestimate the importance of other aspects like soft power, security and political influence.

To clarify the country's intentions in Africa, China has published two white papers on its Africa policy. The first one was published in 2006 (MFA 2006). The second, more recent one, was published in 2015 (China Daily 2015). Both of the papers highlight the key areas of co-operation where China wants to deepen Sino-Africa relations. While the first paper is more generalized in terms of goals, it does elaborate all the fields where China aspires for deeper co-operation. The fields of co-operation are political, economic, education, science, culture, health & social and peace & security (MFA 2006). Co-operation is wanted on all levels of interaction from high-level visits to people-to-people exchanges. The second paper demonstrates in much more details the areas of co-operation. Apart from the evident ones, some surprising co-operation areas are for example media and education (China Daily 2015). Releasing not only one but two white papers on Africa policy, China demonstrates the strategic importance it attaches to the relations with the continent.

While China has gained momentum in Africa and has expanded to all corners and levels of the continent, academia has raised their concerns about China's actions (e.g. Kinyondo 2019 & Van Dijk 2009). As a result, there are plenty of researches with varying opinions on China's Africa policy and its implications on the continent. In this regard, it is possible to detect three different "camps" with distinctive views on what is China's African policy and how effective it has been. The first one is the obvious pro-China camp, which mainly touts the positive aspects of co-operation while disregarding some quite obvious negative outcomes of co-operation (e.g. Addis 2018 & Zhu and

Mahubani 2011). China supporters steadfastly claim that China is going to, or already, has brought rapid development to Africa. The second camp is the anti-China camp that sees China's actions in Africa as purely neocolonialistic (e.g. Quinn 2011 & Jauch 2011). According to the anti-China camp, with its neocolonialistic intentions China tries to control Africa through exploitative trade deals and thus is endangering African states' sovereignty. To put simply China's intentions are to take over Africa through economic means. The third group is the more moderate camp that stands somewhere between pro-China and neocolonialism that critically examines the positive and negative aspects of China's actions in Africa (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, Alden 2005 & Van Dijk 2009). In this study, I aspire to follow the lead of the third camp by maintaining a critical and objective outlook on all aspects of China's Africa policy.

China's reasons for forging strong relations with Africa are numerous. Western academics tend to name four main missions where the last one is differing from academic to academic (e.g. Alden 2005, Shinn 2013 and Hauer & Morris 2014). Alden describes the four missions as follows: resource security, new markets and investment opportunities, forging strategic partnerships and symbolic diplomatic and development assistance (Alden 2005, 148-152). Clearly, the economic aspects of Sino-African relations are taking more central role. While this chapter does not literally follow the missions stated by Alden and others, they guide through the most relevant topics. This chapter will be broken down into three different paragraphs which introduce the main spheres of the policy. The first paragraph will discuss the main concepts of the foreign policy from the overall point of view and introduce the non-interference policy. The second paragraph presents the China-Africa economic co-operation and the infamous soft loans. In the last paragraph China's security policy in Africa will be familiarized.

### **3.1. The basis of Chinese foreign policy**

Since the 1990s the emphasis that Chinese leaders have been putting on China-Africa relations has been demonstrated symbolically every year, when China's Foreign Minister's first official trip of the year is always destined to the African continent (Desheng 2019). The importance is also shown by the overall number of China's top leaders' visits to African countries which is, much higher than the figure of Western leaders. Furthermore, the visits are not only concentrated on larger countries but expand to variety of countries (Lijadu 2019). The annual symbolic first visit has not gone unnoticed among African leaders and has garnered much appreciation. For China these

trips have proven to be an inexpensive and effective way to build state-to-state relations with African nations. (Shinn 2013, 88.) Additionally, China has been demonstrating country's friendship and solidarity by gifting local governments with buildings such as football stadiums, schools, hospitals and even government buildings (Alden 2006, 150). In the case of Djibouti and Uganda, China even financed and build new foreign ministry buildings for both of the countries.

The above cases of expression of friendship are not without a cause as China aims to garner strategic and symbolic diplomatic support from African nations. China has realized that in order to bring forth country's interests in international arenas China needs political partners (Shinn 2013, 85). International political support is needed to increase leeway in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund. In many forums, African nations count almost one-third of all votes (van Dijk 2009, 202) and thus it constitutes as powerful voting bloc. That being said, as mentioned earlier China has several reasons to be in Africa. The next few paragraphs introduce the most relevant parts of China's foreign policy measures in Africa.

### **3.1.1. The three discourses of friendship**

In order to validate and forge strong Sino-African relations, China has adopted different discourses to separate itself from Western powers as well to gain trust of African nations. It is necessary for China to appear as a reliable and friendly partner who can be trusted. The trust between the countries is building on selectively highlighting certain historical events sometimes with slim evidence (Strauss 2009, 780-781). The three discourses are "ancient friendship", "common past under colonial subjugation" and "Tazara narrative". China actively uses these discourses to strengthen and create links between China and Africa (see Wang & Meng 2018 & Wu 2020).

Firstly, China builds its first discourse on the Sino-African relations on common friendship of over 600 years. According to China, this friendship stems from encounters between China and Africa that appeared during the 1400s when admiral Zheng He (郑和) was sent to Eastern Africa by the Yongle emperor to explore the Pacific Ocean, Arabian Peninsula and Eastern Africa. In this narrative, China portrays the relation between China and Africa as always been on equal terms and peaceful, whereas China depicts Western countries as colonialist with a long history of abuse of Africa. While

this discourse is not actively used in foreign policy it builds the character of friendly nations that share a long history together. (Sverdrup-Thygeson 2017, 62-63.) De facto, historically speaking admiral Zheng made a number of trips to the Eastern Africa to explore with a large fleet of warships and military troops. China's claims of friendship and equality have been rebuked various times (e.g. Shinn & Eisenmann 2012 & Wade 2005). Despite the evidence, China still insists on Zhang He's diplomatic intentions in the region. Xinhua News Agency wrote about Zhang He's trip the following which depicts the discourse accurately:

“Along with Zheng's legendary voyages, this is evidence that China chose to be a bringer of peace when it had the potential to be a bully. Unlike later Western explorers driven by greed for gold, diamonds and fragrances, the mammoth fleet of the world's strongest navy at the time brought to foreign countries presents and advanced technology, and even helped mediate conflicts between indigenous clans”. (Xinhua 2005.)

The second discourse China uses is the “colony narrative”, which stresses the common shared history of colonialism. China's message is that Western nations, which colonialized and enslaved African people, are unrelatable, nasty and brutish. This narrative emphasizes how China understands the suffering and problems that African countries have gone through and shares a similar past. Colony narrative is used to differentiate China and Africa from Western powers and their brutal history in the continent. This is important for China in order to underscore the fact that China would not do the same as the West has done in the past. As Sverdrup-Thygeson (2017, 63) argues, the “colony narrative image of identity singles China out with historical moral superiority”. In a way, China is communicating that the country is different and more suitable for cooperation than the West. As described earlier, in this scenario the West is depicted as “the other” that does not belong in the continent. (Sverdrup-Thygeson 2017, 63.)

The last discourse is the TAZARA narrative which is constructed on the basis of support that China gave to decolonizing African nations in the 1960s and 1970s (Sverdrup-Thygeson 2017, 65). The TAZARA (or TaZam) refers to the largescale Tanzania-Zambia railway project that was sponsored and built by China during 1969-1976 as a sign of solidarity towards African nations (Strauss 2009, 786). Nevertheless, before the TAZARA project began China took part in the Asia-Africa Conference in

1955 in Bandung which became the bedrock of Sino-Africa relations. During the Conference China aligned itself with the rest of the world's developing countries (Strauss 2009, 782). The "Bandung Spirit" and China's Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence share similar ideals of peaceful and supportive co-existence. China's principles of peaceful co-existence will be later introduced in the next chapter.

Following the Bandung Conference, China started to offer economic, technical and military support for struggling nations seeking independence from colonial rule in Africa. Evidently, this meant not respecting the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. At the same time, the struggles between China and the Soviet Union escalated and resulted in hostile relations between the two. This led up to China seeking diplomatic support from African nations. Close ties with Africa, led by Egypt to be the first African country to recognize the PRC, while ROC still retained the official seat of the UN Security Council. (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, 34-36.)

This era's most notable form of support was the TAZARA. First, the project was officially offered to Western countries, but publicly rejected, then later it was picked up by China (Strauss 2009, 787). TAZARA was eventually accomplished with economical and technical support from China. The project demanded 50 000 Chinese workers and engineers' efforts which resulted in an 1860-kilometer long railway between Tanzania and Zambia. The support China gave at the time symbolizes country's benevolence even during a time when China itself was poor as well. To China this act of sincerity shows that the Chinese will not turn their back on African nations in the future either. This era has become the major discourse China is using in its policies towards Africa. (Sverdrup-Thygeson 2017, 65.) Despite the importance attached to the TAZARA project in modern era discourse, in fact at the time of construction the railway had very little exposure in Chinese media (Strauss 2009, 787).

To conclude, these discourses are used to naturalize China's presence and white-wash China's intentions in Africa. While Zheng He, the Tazara and anticolonial narrative might not be used in daily reporting on Sino-African relations, the narratives are reoccurring and central for China's rhetoric (Sverdrup-Thygeson 2017, 68). To China, this discourse is carefully crafted and solidifies the long-lasting friendship of Sino-African relations and negates claims of China's neocolonialist intentions. While in this study these narratives stay in the background, the same motives and narratives can be seen in the data as well.

### 3.1.2. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the non-interference policy

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were first established during the negotiations between China, India and Myanmar in the 1950s during border altercations (MFA 2014). From then on, these principles have been the core of China's foreign policy. The five principles are as follows: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (MFA 2014). Later these have been dubbed to be called as the non-interference policy. China's Consulate General in Karachi comments how the principles are closely intertwined with foreign policy:

“China's development is peaceful in nature, and it will not harm or threaten anyone. China will never seek to advance its interests at the expense of others. China does not seek hegemony now, nor will it do so in the future. -- China has been interacting with its neighbors for thousands of years. And all along, we have valued harmonious relations and treated others with sincerity. When others respect us, we respect them even more. Going forward, we will more actively practice the guideline of "amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness". We will help our neighboring countries and peoples benefit more from China's reform and opening up. We will help them better appreciate China's commitment to peaceful development. We are willing to listen to voices from our neighboring countries and respond to their doubts about China's neighbourhood policy”. (MFA 2014.)

To summarize, from China's perspective the policy is essentially based on mutual respect towards every country's culture, sovereignty and internal affairs. Thus, China presses only one pre-condition for its counterparts and that is an acknowledgement of One-China policy which denounces the existence of sovereign Taiwan (Embassy of China in Norway 2004). China constitutes Taiwan issue as country's internal affair and thus do not tolerate other countries involvement in the matter (Embassy of China in Norway 2004). Traditionally, Africa has been a diplomatic support ground for Taiwan although at the moment all African nations, apart from Eswatini (former Swaziland), have recognized the One-China policy (Solomon 2018). In practice, non-interference policy refers to China's policy of accepting any country despite its political regime or stability. Topics such as corruption, human right violations, poor governance and the

legitimacy of government do not matter to China as these issues constitute as internal matters from which China stays away.

That being said, the policy has shown misgivings and China applies the non-interference policy far more flexibly than it might present in its official foreign policy discourse. In the case of Africa, it has eventually led China to work with countries with myriad of issues. For example, many African nations that China is in close relations with are either in a fragile state or they have had long-lasting wars. Such countries are, for example, Uganda, Congo, Sudan and South Sudan. In these countries and their subjacent situations China's business and trade interests have collided. Since the non-interference policy has not suited well the extreme conditions in some of these unstable countries, China has been compelled to revise and adopt its policies (e.g. Natsios 2012, Large 2009 & Duchatel et al. 2014). Thus, even China has chosen to *interfere* in some of these countries matters.

A good example, of China's increased involvement, is Sudan. Since the 1990s China has been heavily involved in Sudan's oil industry. In fact, it was with the help of Chinese companies and diplomatic efforts that Sudan could establish and widen its oil business and China's support has become vital for Sudan and South-Sudan. The situation has led to reliance between Sudan and China as China is the main buyer of oil as well as the largest source of investment in the country (Natsios 2012, 62). Between 2000-2017 China imported 68 % of all Sudan's crude oil (OEC). Sudan has experienced continuous instability throughout its history until today. In 2003, instabilities rose again and there were massive protests against the central government in Dafur which is in the western part of country. Khartoum government resolved to violently suppressing the rebellions which left 300 000 people dead and the instabilities are still ongoing. Despite the conflict, China continued to give its political support for the Khartoum government (Lee et al. 2012, 429). In fact, around the time of 2003 China had paid some of the purchased oil with arms that were later used for suppressing the rebellions (Natsios 2012, 63).

The international community, especially non-governmental organizations, as well as human rights groups, were outraged and demanded China to withdraw its support for Sudan and pressure the country to let UN peacekeeping forces to enter the country which China opposed. During many years of conflict China remained unmoved (Benadallah 2016, 26). The rage of Western groups did not diminish, and the groups started to demand boycotting of Beijing 2008 Olympics and the crisis started to have

larger negative impact on China's international reputation. Under the pressure, China did eventually persuade Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir to let UN troops to enter the country which ran against particularly with president Bashir's wishes and later this culminated into Chinese senior leadership expressing *guarded* criticism over Khartoum government's actions (Large 2009, 619). The most visible comments were made by former Chinese President Hu Jintao when he suggested four principles of how to resolve Dafur crisis (Large 2009, 619.)

However, the struggles did not end there and instabilities eventually led to civil war and the consequent division of Sudan. The civil war resulted in the division of China's oil interests, with around 75 % of oil production being in South Sudan and this led China to shift its diplomatic efforts to the South. By doing this, China ended up "protecting their tenuous position in the South but at the same time alienated and angered the North" (Natsios 2012, 66). North and South's disputes continued and shifted towards oil and the oil pipeline that goes through the North. Eventually, North started to demand hefty 36\$ per barrel transfer fee instead of the standard 1\$ per barrel (Natsios 2012, 66) which led South Sudan to shut down the oil production entirely for an extended period of time. This then resulted in economic losses to Chinese oil companies and dissatisfaction for China. To conclude, the continuous instabilities and threat of war, international pressure, fear of losing the access to oil has prompted China to take more active approach to China's Sudan policy while increasing China's participation in both Sudan's internal matters (Natsios 2012, 64).

According to Alden & Large (2015, 124), despite China's high visibility and significance in many of these post-war countries, it lacks coherent post-conflict and fragile state approaches. Such approaches are needed if China wants to keep doing business in unstable countries in Africa. But unlike many believe, African nations' instability extends much further than China's economic concerns, which is why China, as a permanent member of the UN's Security Council, must weigh in to make sensible decisions (Alden & Large 2015, 124). In the case of Sudan, China repeatedly protected Sudan's regime in the UN Security Council by voting against resolutions against the Sudanese government and vetoing resolutions also by hampering the UN Security Council's decision-making process (Manyok 2016, 4). To conclude, it can be stated that not only did China use its diplomatic relations to influence Sudanese decision making within the country, China did also use its position within the UN Security Council for its own benefits. With the addition of China's peacekeeping work Alden & Large claim

that in some sense China is in the process of becoming a norm maker in Africa (Alden & Large 2015, 125). This then points to the direction of China being flexible with the interpretation of non-interference policy.

Although, China is projecting slight changes in its approach to non-interference policy, it is still unlikely that China would abandon the policy anytime soon. The reason being that China does not have a post-conflict policy in itself as China has entirely different look on development and peace altogether compared to the conventional Western model (Alden & Large 2015, 139). This being said, China ties peace and development closely together (Benadallah 2016, 19). The Chinese concept of peace is built on four different aspects that differentiate itself from Western and African concept of peace building.

First and the most prominent aspect is the notion that universal human rights, elections, democracy and market economy are not necessary for building peace. This is the most distinctive difference between Western and Chinese thinking. Secondly, unlike Western policy makers, the Chinese exclusively believe that peace is built through economic development. The development is achieved through vast investments in infrastructure, e.g. railways, airports, ports, highways and power stations. Thirdly, the standing of regional organizations should be enhanced in global security management. This means that regional offices, such as the African Union, should have a larger say when engagement with their member states is considered and their opinions should be respected. Lastly, the African states themselves are crucial in peacebuilding and emphasis should be given to their human resource development training, which is critical for fragile states' development. (Alden & Large 2015, 135-136).

From China's point of view, their policy of peace building through development comes directly from the experience and success of China's own rapid development (Benadallah 2016, 16) and which it wished to be translated to success in Africa. Although cases like Sudan demonstrate that in complicated situations economic development might not be enough to bring peace and stability. Nevertheless, China offers an alternative model to Western one that is appealing especially for African leaders and countries that have a hard time gaining support from traditional institutions (van Dijk 2009, 203).

### 3.2. Trade policy

China's economic influence in Africa is strong and broad extending to all corners of Africa. Economic wise China needs Africa and Africa needs China. In order to sustain Chinese factories working, it needs to purchase seemingly limitless amounts of raw materials like copper, coal, cobalt and oil from Africa. In return, China imports finished affordable consumer goods for demands of the African markets (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, 99) and gives out the soft loans for massive infrastructure projects. China is no a small player in the continent as demonstrated by the share amount of trade that is passing between China and Africa. At the moment China is Africa's largest trading partner having surpassed the United States in 2009 (Luo 2018). Sino-African trade has been growing steadily over the years and in 2018, China-Africa trade was worth staggering \$185 billion dollars (CARI 2020). According to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) trade between Africa and China increased on year to year basis staggering 19,7 % in 2018 (MOFCOM 2019).

Despite impressive numbers and ostensibly forever growing trade, China has a \$20 billion trade surplus to Africa (CARI 2020). A closer look also reveals that China exports a variety of different types of goods to Africa ranging from consumer goods, capital goods, intermediary goods to textiles and clothing which is all natural. Meanwhile imports from Africa to China include mainly raw materials, fuels and minerals. (WITS Database.) The imbalance does not support Africa's development as the countries would unwillingly focus on producing products that there is demand for. While Africa as a whole is prone to have trade deficit to China on yearly basis, on the country level the numbers are different. In these cases, countries with rich raw materials (like Angola, South Sudan and Zambia) tend to have large surplus unlike countries with little mineral resources (like Egypt, Ethiopia and Liberia) which have to endure large trade deficits (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, 115-116). Then, the countries with large deficits to China are flooded with large quantities of low-quality textiles, clothes and footwear (Shinn 2013, 90).

#### 3.2.1. Soft loans

The most well-known and debated form of Sino-African economic co-operation are the infamous multi-billion soft loans that are intended for large infrastructure projects. These soft loans have been highly criticized by the West, especially Western media, but

– at the same time – they are highly valued by African leaders (Alden 2006, 91). The loans are the backbone of China's economic policy in Africa and, therefore, the topic needs a closer look to be fully understood.

To begin with, Chinese loans are difficult to track as China does not release official data about them. China Africa Research Initiative at John Hopkins University (CARI) has the most comprehensive data base of Chinese loans, although they admit that as there is much secrecy surrounding the loans the exact numbers and conditions remain a mystery. In return, the recipient countries do not necessarily want to disclose all the details either. Between 2000-2017 CARI estimates that Chinese government, banks and SOEs have granted loans worth 146 billion dollars to African nations. While the loans seem staggering, there are vast differences between individual countries on how much loan has been taken. Nevertheless, it is vital to be reminded that by no means is China the largest creditor in Africa. (CARI.) Jubilee Debt Campaign estimates that 20 % of the debt in Africa originates from China or Chinese companies or banks (Jubilee Debt Campaign 2018). As in any country in the world, the loans are divided between different creditors ranging from multilateral institutions to other bilateral creditors besides China. However, some countries have taken more debt from China compared to others. The top receiver of Chinese loans in Africa is Angola, which has received 42,8 billion dollars over 17 years' time period (CARI).

While every soft loan agreement is negotiated in its own terms, they still tend to have often similar characteristics and the following section will introduce some of these characteristics. The most recognizable aspect of China's soft loans is the basis of seemingly "no strings attached" with only condition being the acceptance of One-China policy. Although it is likely that if African leaders would comment on China's treatment of Tibetans or Uyghurs or anything along those lines, the cash flow might stop (Shinn 2013, 92). Essentially, there are no other political preconditions attached to them, unlike with multinational institution loans granted by OECD, IMF World Bank and such. Multinational loans have often preconditions attached to them like improvement of human rights situation, democracy or fair governance practices and demand substantial negotiations to be approved (Behuria 2018, 171). In the contrary, Chinese soft loans can be negotiated in few months with flexible back-payment timetables. Thus, it is no wonder that China's soft loans are attractive to governments whose policies have resulted in impoverishment, fueled internal conflicts or have systematically violated

human rights (Alden 2006, 154). Naturally, these types of governments would have difficulties to obtain loans from multinational loan givers due to inability to meet the requirements of foreign loan givers. As China treats these kinds of issues as countries' internal matter, any sovereign government is applicable as a loan receiver without regard to their current political situation. In the past, China was, for example, supporting the Guinean government economically and politically during massacre that left 150 people dead and missing (Balint-Kurti, 2010, 17). At the time the UN, African Union and all the Western nations ceased all co-operation with the country, but China did not. Similar circumstances occurred in Sudan during the civil war. However, it would be a mistake to think that only corrupt governments would take on Chinese loan offers.

The popularity of Chinese soft loans might not come as surprising if one looks at the matter closer. Many African countries lack even the most basic infrastructure meaning there is no reliable source of energy nor is there roads. The situation is severe and should not be understated. "For instance, only 38 % of the African population has access to electricity, the penetration rate for the Internet is less than 10 %, while only a quarter of Africa's road network is paved. Studies have shown that poor road, rail and port facilities add 30 % to 40 % to the costs of goods traded among African countries, thus adversely affecting the private sector development and the flow of foreign direct investment (FDI)" (Mayaki n.d). In addition, African leaders do not want political conditionality imposed by Western leaders who often see Western conditions as paternalistic (Hanauert & Morris 2014, 57). As African countries see China understanding their culture and history better than the previous Western colonizers.

As lucrative these loans may appear, Chinese soft loan deals seem to come with some setbacks. Naturally, many of the issues stem from the weak rule of law in the host country but also from the contracts themselves. Firstly, as stated earlier the loans are often granted for large infrastructure projects. After African country secures the loan for the project, Chinese state-owned companies (SOEs) would in most of the cases wind up winning the projects and executing them (Shinn 2013, 92). When Chinese companies handle these large infrastructure projects, they are often built with Chinese workers brought out from mainland. When African laborers are hired, they do the most menial tasks with no chance to advance and often get paid less compared to Chinese workers. (Hanauer & Morris 2014, 48.) The lack of transparency and competitive bidding makes

the projects vulnerable for corruption as well as these types of projects run a risk of inflated costs (Morris 2020).

Projects also often use materials that are brought from all the way from China which seems an unorthodox way compared to more traditional projects. According to Hubbard (2008) Chinese side even encourages Chinese companies to “purchase and import from China as much equipment, technology and services as possible” (2008, 225). This line of development does not bring much needed new jobs or human development to Africa nor does it even support the local economy by using local materials. Many of the projects also have been accused of violating labor laws and not following safety measures (Jauch 2011, 55). For example, the situation in Zambia escalated so badly that local mob ended up killing one Chinese and injuring two after Chinese company was accused of not respecting labor laws (Okeowo 2013). Some have also raised concerns over the environmental impact of the said projects (van Dijk 2009, 208).

In addition, corruption and bribes are common in connection with Chinese loans and businesses (Isakson & Kotsadam 2018, 157). Corruption is typical in the negotiation period as after signing the contracts Chinese party keeps tight gaps on the finances of the projects by administrating the funds themselves (Hanauer & Morris 2014, 51). Due to corruption and lack of transparency involved when taking loans, sometimes even the recipient governments are unaware of all the agreed terms which might cause political turmoil and add a risk of wasted government funds. Many of the issues seem to be similar to the issues China faces itself back home. While the issues are widely reported, there are also success stories and their significance is undeniable.

Due to the inequality of the loans and the subsequent consequences in Africa, the loans have revoked some scholars and especially Western media to call loans as “debt-trap diplomacy” (e.g. Kiyondo 2019, Behuria 2018 & Jauch 2011). Debt trap diplomacy refers to China’s lending policy that intentionally lends out massive sums to countries to extract geopolitical concessions (Rajah et al. 2019, 4). Besides the above-mentioned criticism, there are far more comprehensive issues at hand when it comes to Chinese funded loans. Firstly, there are researches that prove that Chinese loans have higher interest rates and shorter gracing periods (Buchholz 2019). While compared to commercial loans these rates might not be high but compared to traditional lenders, they are harsh (Morris 2020). Secondly, many of the loans payback methods are tied to

countries' alternative assets. This can mean giving access to raw minerals, mineral deposits, ports access rights and such (Green 2019). Despite Chinese loan shortcomings, African leaders are aware of the risks involved with the massive debt they have undertaken and are ready to call off agreements and projects, if needed (Benabdallah, 2019). While varying opinions remain if China is actually performing debt trap diplomacy, there are still very few examples of China ceasing the operations of an entire facility in Africa. Thus, some recent studies find that while China does not practice debt-trap diplomacy *per se*, it nevertheless needs to review its harmful lending practices (e.g. Rajah et al. 2019, Brautigam 2019 & Gong 2020). Sri Lanka's Hambantota port is said to be the precedent example of China seizing national strategic infrastructure due to unpaid debt.

A small West Asian country of Sri Lanka is a prime example of a country that has accumulated debt of around 8-9 billion US dollars from Chinese state-owned banks (Behuria 2018, 174). Before the beginning of the project, Hambantota was a small insignificant fishing village, but – with the help of China – it was suddenly envisioned to become a future hotspot for trade in the Indian Pacific. When the project started, it was supposed to pay back itself commercially and transform the economy of the surrounding area. Despite the promises and grand plans, the Chinese led project has been underperforming and as a result, Sri Lanka has had to surrender its strategic Hambantota port with a 99-year lease to Chinese companies with 80 % ownership as well as 15 000 acres of land around it to be developed as an industrial zone for Chinese investors (Behuria 2018, 173). Later, rumors surfaced that Hambantota would be turned into a Chinese military base, but Sri Lanka prime minister rebuked the claims shortly after they surfaced (Times of India 2018). Recently, Western observers are also worried about Djibouti, which has accumulated debt of around \$1,2 billion from which 77 % originates from either the Chinese government or Chinese state-owned enterprises (Blanchard & Collins 2019). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated that by the end of 2018 Djibouti's public debt will mound up to 104 % of its GDP (IMF 2018).

While nothing similar has yet to happen in Africa, apart from Djibouti there are already multiple African countries that are in a brink of defaulting loans originating from China. Statista names Niger and the Republic of Congo whose external debt to China exceeds 25 % of their GDP (Buchholz 2019.) In spring 2020, senior Zambian officials informed that they are considering surrendering country's third-largest copper mine to China in

exchange for debt forgiveness (Parkinson et al. 2020). Around the same time, Angolan Minister of State for Economic Coordination, Manuel Nunes Júnior informed that the country is renegotiating their terms of Chinese loans to end the use of oil as a guarantee for bilateral debt (Macauhub 2020). To be precise, Angola has had also similar terms for its loans with Brazil and Israel as well. What needs to be considered is that many countries, also Western ones, have external debt and they also face difficulties in repaying thus facing payment struggles is nothing unusual *per se*. That being said, observers point out that if not careful, these loans could pose a serious threat to African countries economy (e.g. Kiyondo 2018, van Dijk 2009).

Despite all the criticism, the Chinese built infrastructure has undoubtedly contributed to African GDP growth (Hanauer & Morris 2014, 49). The Chinese loans offer unseen possibilities to African nations as long as they are not too excessive and are managed well. The impact China has had on Africa is not as negative as some would suggest but certainly not as positive as China claims (Morris 2020). African leaders themselves seem unbothered by Western observers' criticism and even in the situation of debt crisis African leaders still prefer to seek help from China. If African leadership would take more responsibility and China, in return, would follow more sustainable debt measures, the outcomes of Chinese led projects would have far more positive results.

### **3.3. Security policy**

China's 2015 white paper on Military Strategy defines new tasks for the PLA. What used to be called "offshore defence" which focused on defending Chinese territory and helping out with domestic security issues, the PLA has now shifted towards a strategy of "active defence", which involves safeguarding the security of China's overseas interests and maintaining regional and world peace (Legarda 2018). Despite the more international outlook 2015 white paper still maintains the basis of the non-interference policy by stating that:

"China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development, pursue an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy that is defensive in nature, oppose hegemonism and power politics in all forms, and will never seek hegemony or expansion. China's armed forces will remain a staunch force in maintaining world peace." (State Council 2015.) Formally, in accordance with the non-interference policy the country adheres to military-to-

military relations that are “non-aligned, non-confrontational and not directed against any third party” (PRC’s State Council 2015).

The only exception from this is the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance between China and North Korea (Boc 2019). When it comes to China’s international areas of priorities for security matters Africa is not at the top of China’s priority list (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, 164). The South China Sea and East China Sea conflicts and relations between China and its neighboring countries are much more important for China’s interests. This perspective is clearly shown also through the development of China-Africa security ties throughout history. As stated already earlier during Mao’s era, China’s support was based on idealistic values, and it mainly supported African nations who were seeking independence. China helped them by providing military assistance, arms and training to selected African nations. After several African nations had secured their independence during the 1960s and 1970s, China’s policies shifted towards more conventional military cooperation, which meant high level visits, arms sales and joint-military exchanges. From the 1990s onwards, the pivotal point of China’s security policy in Africa has been the United Nations peacekeeping work, which has become the main part of China’s security policy in Africa. More recently, while China’s presence in the continent has grown, so has the number of Chinese citizens and economic interests. This has led China to take an initiative to protect its interests by actively participating in the fight against Somali piracy in the Gulf of Aiden and near waters. As the number of Chinese have soared, so has the need to secure their safety, meaning that the protection of its own citizens has become relevant part of China’s policy in Africa. (Shinn & Eisenmann 2012, 164-166.)

During the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in summer 2018, President Xi Jinping gave a keynote speech on the future of China-Africa peace and security ties, which not only accurately demonstrates the current situation of China-Africa security ties but also emphasizes the direction in which China wants to lead the future of its cross-regional relations:

“--we will launch a peace and security initiative. China decided to set up a China-Africa peace and security fund to boost our cooperation on peace, security, peacekeeping, and law and order. China will continue to provide military aid to the AU and will support countries in the Sahel region and those

bordering the Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Guinea in upholding security and combating terrorism in their regions. A China-Africa peace and security forum will be established as a platform for conducting more exchanges in this area. Fifty security assistance programs will be launched to advance China-Africa cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, and in areas of law and order, UN peacekeeping missions, fighting piracy and combating terrorism". (Xinhua 2018a.)

The speech pinpoints the key areas of cooperation which are 1) providing military aid to the African Union and other regional institutions, 2) fighting terrorism in the region, 3) participating in UN missions and expanding China-Africa military cooperation while respecting African nations sovereignty and 4) establishing China Africa Security Forum. First ever China Africa Security Forum was organized in summer 2018, and it lasted two weeks. During the forum, 50 African leaders and the African Union representatives discussed such issues as security in Africa and Africa's independent capacity-building in security. In addition, African leaders also visited PLA establishments. (Xinhua 2018b.)

Despite the rather "weak" past of China-Africa security ties, new more active rhetoric and the opening of military base is indicating a turning point towards more active policies. I would like to argue that Africa is shaping to become more important tool for China's foreign policy and will play out far more vital role in the future. Now China navigates and engages in security matters through the United Nations security missions and through UN Security Council as it seeks more involved role in the UN.

### **3.3.1. China's peacekeeping work**

China is one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping and a strong supporter of the UN's work. At the moment, China is the second largest donor of funds for the UN Peacekeeping missions after the United States and the largest donor of military personnel out of the five permanent security members. In 2019, China's contributions accounted to around 15,22 % of all the funds which was around \$7 billion (He 2019). Out of the Chinese troops that are currently deployed 85 % of them are in Africa (He 2019). Initially, when China joined the United Nations Security Council in 1971, the situation was very different. At the time China was strictly against the idea of participating in peacekeeping operations (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, 183). The reason for this was, yet again, China's stance on the non-interference which led China to consider the UN missions as meddling with countries' internal affairs. While China adopted

more open policies towards the world, also its involvement with the UN grew more relaxed. While China started to finance the UN missions in 1982, the country did not start to take part in the peacekeeping operations until the 1990's (Fung 2016).

Chinese peacekeepers have been mainly in supportive roles which means that Chinese troops do not get involved in armed conflicts and they carry on supportive work such as hospital, infrastructure and mine clearing. The last stamp for China's full UN membership came in 2013 when first time China sent out "comprehensive" UN security troops to Mali and in 2014 when China first time send out combat battalion to South-Sudan with the UN mandate to protect civilians (Institute for Security and Development Policy 2018, 6). Traditionally, the troops China has sent out consist of engineers, medical teams and logisticians that are the backbone of any UN mission. These types of troops are generally on high value during missions as their training is costly and thus, they might be sparse in developing countries (Fung 2016).

Despite the initial slow pace, peacekeeping has now become an important part of China's foreign policy and especially Africa policy. In fact, there are multiple reasons why China participates in UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO). Firstly, through peacekeeping China can participate in peace work and secure peace in conflict areas that threaten Chinese business interests and citizens. As long as Chinese projects and businesses keep expanding in Africa, there is bound to be more security risks. Chinese have been a target of hostilities multiple times and in order to avoid domestic criticism over involvement in Africa, China needs to protect its citizens. Secondly, peacekeeping missions offer invaluable experience on field and how to operate in multinational operations (Fung 2016). Chinese troops have relatively small amount of combat experience and this sort of experience is invaluable, if China ever faces military threats. Lastly, peace missions boost China's reputation and status as a protector of peace while mitigating its defense spending. It is also a low-cost method of showing how China is prepared and committed to the protection of global stability. (Institute for Security & Development Policy 2018, 1-3.) China has been accused of growing military power and peacekeeping operations debunk some of these accusations (Lanteigne 2018, 3).

China's enthusiasm and commitment to participate in PKO seems to be still growing. In 2015, President Xi Jinping promised to contribute an 8 000 troops standby force for UN missions (Martina & Brunnstrom 2015). During the same speech, Xi pledged \$100

million for African Union to establish its own standby force within the following five years. Whilst China commits more to peacekeeping, there are growing amount of concerns for China. In modern warfare the line between traditional conflict and terrorism gets blurred and, in these situations, the Chinese mentality of non-interference might get contradictory (Lanteigne 2018, 5). More China gets involved, the messier modern conflicts get the harder it is to stay neutral. Nevertheless, China's commitment to peacekeeping is now a vital part of China's foreign and security policy.

### 3.3.2. Military related human resource programs

China and Africa engage in multilevel and multifield human resource program exchanges on all levels. These programs spawn from grassroots and expand to all different fields from farming to governance and military. In a typical program, China invites experts to participate in a short-term training in China or sends out its own experts to Africa for longer periods of time. Naturally, the amount of non-military related programs outweighs the military ones in numbers. (Benabdellah 2016, 21-25.)

Military training between China and Africa has long roots as the training can be traced back to Mao's times when China supported African revolutionary wars for independence (Benabdellah 2016, 24). More recently, China's white paper on Military Strategy names training as one of the key areas of military co-operation between the Chinese military and foreign militaries. White paper pledges that "the Chinese military will also strengthen cooperation with related countries in personnel training, material assistance, equipment and technology, so as to strengthen mutual support and enhance respective defensive capabilities" (State Council 2015).

Military training provided by China can be categorized in two ways: first is the long-term training provided by Chinese peacekeeping forces and the second is short-term training provided by the Ministry of National Defense in China. Training happens in the field of military education, equipment maintenance and health care. Thus far at least Angola, Zimbabwe, Sudan and Equatorial Guinea have received Chinese training. (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, 174.) Apart from conventional military training, China also provides training in part with military purchases. Shinn & Eisenman also speculate that providing *pro bono* military training is an effort to sell advanced weaponry (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, 174).

The second form of military training happens in conjunction with China's peacekeeping efforts. While stationed for long terms in host countries, Chinese peacekeepers are also tasked to train locals. The vast majority of Chinese peacekeeping troops are non-combat units and their skills vary from engineering to medical. Even the combat forces are encouraged to help train local troops while stationed overseas. Such an example is Chinese language school that was set up for orphans in the Republic of Congo by Chinese peacekeepers. Chinese peacekeepers humanitarian efforts are well received by African leaders and locals who applaud Chinese for sharing their skills. (Benadallah 2016, 125-126.)

Due to China's adherence to the non-interference policy, military training remains an important form of military co-operation. The Action Plan of Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2018 states that "The two sides will expand defense and military personnel training. China will continue to step up training for African service personnel. The two sides will continue to deepen academic exchanges and cooperation among military academies and research institutes and will enhance cooperation on military medical science to improve Africa's capacity in this regard." (FOCAC 2018.) For China providing free training for African militaries is a convenient way of gaining more positive image of China as well as building stronger military relations. It is probable that in the future China will engage in more military-to-military training.

### **3.3.3. Arms deals**

Globally, at the moment China is the second largest producer of weapons, only behind the United States (Tian & Su 2020, 15), but as an arms exporter China comes only as the fifth largest arms supplier in the world (Wezeman et al. 2020, 2). Between 2015-2019, out of all the Chinese exports only 16 % of exported arms were destined to Africa, the main export destination being Asia and Oceania. This being said, virtually every country in Africa has purchased weapons from China at some point and the United States Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) names Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia as some of China's key customers of weapons (DIA 2019, 108). As an interesting comparison in Europe only Belarus has purchased Chinese weapons. While at the moment China is still not a provider of major arms in Africa, it is a major provider of SALW. SALW refers to small arms and light weapons which typically are rifles, machine guns, rocket launchers and such, whereas major arms refer to missiles, fighter planes, naval ships, air defense systems, nuclear weapons and so on. Revenue earnings from SALW are limited so it is widely believed that China is selling SALW for political gain (Cordesman et al.

2019, 240). Overall, according to DIA China “primally conducts arms sales in conjunction with economic aid and development assistance to support its broader foreign policy goals, such as securing access to natural resources and export markets, promoting its political influence among host country elites and building support in international forums” (DIA 2019, 107).

Chinese SALW came to center stage when they suddenly started to appear in all parts of Africa during 1990’s conflicts. It is important to be noted that many of these SALW were diverted from their official end-use by African states or recycled between conflict areas. However, China has been supplying arms for conflicting parties (Bromley et al. 2013, 37). As earlier stated in the paragraph discussing China’s non-interference policy, Chinese SALW were one of the issues Western observers brought up during the Darfur crisis. Similar incident happened in 2008 when a Chinese weapon shipment on the way to Mugabe’s Zimbabwe was halted and again in 2011 when it was exposed that Chinese companies had offered to sell \$200 million worth of arms to Muammar Gaddafi (Taylor & Wu 2013, 458). Both of these cases have raised concerns of who China conducts its arms deals with. These examples reveal how the non-interference policy plays prominent role also in China’s arms deals. Relatively small amount of SALW can have a vast impact on peace and security in Africa, while contributing to political violence in a way that is not proportioned with the number of arms or with the value of arms (Taylor & Wu 2013, 458). Africa has many fragile states and continuous instabilities which have left the continent vulnerable. In addition, armed militant groups and terrorists are a growing threat in the region and they are an active part of arms deals. Additionally, tracking SALW is problematic in Africa as China and other governments, including Western ones, conceal their SALW transactions and African countries themselves also do not report transactions correctly, thus more transparency is needed (Holtom & Pavesi 2018, 69).

Officially, Chinese officials deny that they are in arms business to make money, however some African officials begged to differ. China also denies accusations that it would sell arms to conflict areas but acknowledges that Chinese arms have shown up in conflict zones through international arms dealers. (Shinn & Eisenmann 2012, 171-172.) In order to compact the effects of Chinese weapons and especially SALW in Africa, China has taken considerable measures to better track and control the end-usage of its products but there are still some improvements that need to be made (Bromley 2013,

54). Chinese weapons are attractive especially to developing countries as they are less expensive compared to many other major arms suppliers (DIA 2019, 107). At the same time, many consider them having lower quality and reliability. However, many Chinese arms deals come with enticements, such as gifts, donations and flexible payment methods and in addition Chinese weapons tend to have less end-use restrictions and they are less monitored (Cordesman et al. 2019, 237). This provides more options for countries that have fewer alternatives due to political restrictions or economic reasons. For example, the EU led arms embargos ban the sale of arms to the following African countries: the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Zimbabwe (SIPRI n.d). Furthermore, Chinese arms are increasingly advanced, and the quality is improving (Chan 2016). As China gains more reputation as major arms supplier, it is inevitable to attract the interest in Africa due to its products competitive pricing and due to African nations' challenging circumstances.

## 4. Data Analysis

In this chapter I will introduce the data findings of this research. The findings are results of careful data collection, coding, recoding and analyzing. After careful consideration three main themes rose from the data and these themes are 4.1) Global responsibilities 4.2) Military and 4.3.) Win-win co-operation. Main topics are then later divided under subcategories which fall under the main themes. Each theme is named to distinguish different groups but as the themes are very similar to each other, they do overlap in some ways. Through these themes I will introduce the main findings and observations and answer to the first research question of how China justifies the opening of its first military base.

Since Chinese government decided to open military base in Djibouti, it has been utmost important for China to explain, and, in a way, validate, their new presence in Djibouti in the eyes of the world. While China keeps changing, evolving and adopting the new role in world arena, so does the expectations and views of the international audience. As China chooses to continue apply and enforce their already existing foreign policies, I argue that China's only choice has been to minimize the purpose and use of military base in Djibouti. The concepts discussed in the earlier chapters such as: the non-interference policy, peaceful development and BRI are closely intertwined with the establishment of the military base and thus with the subsequent reasoning for the opening.

### 4.1. Global responsibilities

When one starts to learn about Chinese culture one of the first thing, they learn is the importance of *mianzi* (面子) which means face or one's reputation. For the Chinese losing face or reputation is far more disgraceful than in many other cultures. While connecting the Chinese concept of *mianzi* with China's foreign policy might be far stretched, they do have something peculiarly similar to each other. While China's assertiveness in foreign policy field is in its all-time high, the country still lacks certain trust and reputation among international peers. According to Pew Research Center's opinion poll results globally the view of China is historically low especially in the West and in the countries neighboring China but the views in Sub-Saharan Africa are favorable towards China (Silver, Devlin & Huang 2019). Thus, one could argue that

China's image is somewhat conflicting. Whilst China wants to appear as someone who protects peace and order, this image is challenged by China's sometimes controversial actions. Earlier example of this is the South China Sea dispute, in which China does not appear as the champion of world peace but rather as regional hegemony seeking growing power.

#### **4.1.1. The non-interference policy & peaceful development**

Essentially, the cornerstone of China's foreign policy has been peaceful development that entails the non-interference policy. As stated earlier, non-interference policy refers to policy of not meddling with another sovereign country's affairs without countries' or international bodies mandate (e.g. the United Nations or the African Union). China's struggle of defining what does interfering and not interfering mean seems complicated and sometimes conflicting. The conflicting part presents itself clearly, when it comes to the case of Chinese military base. Any country opening a military base in any part of world signifies that there must be an existing need for it. A need that is so great that the said country is willing to pay millions to open and operate it on yearly basis. Whether such military base is for protection or offence, it always has a sort of influence seeking quality to it. Simply speaking, no one opens any military establishment for "storage".

While China might not want its military base to be perceived as one of seeking to influence, it still does so for the international audience and some commentators point out the opening of the base is turning point for China's security policy (Cabestan 2019, 15). Despite this notion, data presents that China continues to promote its policy of peaceful development even with the opening a military base (e.g. MFA 2017a & Sun 2017). By promoting peaceful development China attempts to assure that its intentions in Djibouti, and in the region in general, are peaceful and non-aggressive in nature. Below quotes from People's Daily are typical statements found from the data:

"China will not seek military interference into regional and other countries' affairs and not seek military expansion --. China has long insisted on a defensive defense policy". (Yuan 2016.)

"Even if China wanted set up overseas bases for military purposes, the bases would still be in line with China's peaceful strategy of non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs ... We will work to guarantee that our base is just and legitimate, -" (People's Daily 2016c).

Although opening the military base seems to contradict itself with non-interference policy, Barton (2018, 418) suggests that China sees this type of engagement as norm in the future as China moves to more flexible adaptation of non-interference policy. According to Barton (2018, 425) this implies that from China's point of view opening military establishment with authorization of local sovereign country is still adhering to the non-interference policy. In the case of military base in Djibouti, data shows that China has emphasized in many of the statements that, in fact, the decision to establish was made "through friendly negotiations" between China and Djibouti (e.g. MFA 2017c, MFA 2015a & Zhang 2017). Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Geng Shuang commented the matter the following:

"The establishment of the Djibouti logistics support base of the Chinese troops is a decision made by the two countries through friendly negotiations" (MFA 2017b).

The data proves that in the viewpoint of China, the military base is in line with the non-interference policy despite the obvious contraction as the base is established on friendly terms.

#### **4.1.2. Protector of Africa and the world**

As Voltaire once said, "with great power comes great responsibility". Voltaire seems to be liking to Chinese leaders as global responsibility is one of the key elements that the country uses in identity building (Hoo 2018, xiv). In this light, it does not come as a surprise that one of the main arguments that China uses to reason the Djibouti military base is China's wish to assume more global responsibility. The notion of "to better fulfill international responsibilities and obligations" (e.g. MFA 2015a, MFA 2015b, People's Daily 2017a, Liu 2017), was reiterated in most of the articles and statements concerning the base. The following quote is an exemplary case:

"Governments of China and Djibouti consulted with each other and reached consensus on building logistical facilities in Djibouti, -- in a bid to enable them to better fulfill international responsibilities and obligations and safeguard peace and stability of the region and beyond" (MFA 2016a).

What is interesting about this notion is how China connects seemingly easily the opening of a military base to better fulfilling international responsibilities. While it is accurate, that there has been a growing amount of demands for China to take on more

global responsibilities by international audience (Fang & Sun 184, 2019), no one probably expected China to respond to these demands by establishing military base. The former president of United States Barack Obama reminded China that “China’s extraordinary development over the last two decades, that with expanding power and prosperity also comes with increased responsibilities” (White House 2012). With these demands, the West has wished China to take more active role in peacekeeping and responsible role in global economy not expand its military reach.

Consequently, to China the military base is not only response for growing demands by the West, but also important part of China’s evolving identity. In this regard one can argue that, according to China, the military base is an effective response to these demands. As a result, Djibouti base seems to be only the beginning as China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi proclaimed in 2016, that “China is willing to shoulder more international security responsibilities (Global Times 2016c). In similar fashion many of the articles had a notion that military base is essential for China to “safeguard regional peace and stability” (MFA 2015a, People’s Daily 2017a & Global Times 2016b). The following quote is from Ministry of Foreign Affairs regular press conference:

“What needs to be pointed out is that regional peace and stability serves the interests of all countries and meets the aspirations shared by China, Djibouti and other countries around the world. The Chinese side is ready and obliged to make more contributions to that end”. (MFA 2015a.)

The impression of a responsible global actor and moral world protector, that China can be seen building in the data, is intriguing. As stated in the earlier paragraph, the non-interference policy is still a prominent policy principle so for China to proclaim to “protect the region” sounds farfetched and unlikely at least in the literal sense of it. I argue, that these promises are empty words used merely for rhetoric purposes to convince the reader for China’s peaceful intentions. Due to China’s non-interference policy and lack of combat experience, it seems unlikely that in the case of violent aggressions, China would act alone without the UN mandate. Nevertheless, China’s self-claim as the protector of peace is not entirely unfounded, as China does participate in the UN peacekeeping missions as well as in multilateral anti-piracy missions in the region in question.

#### **4.1.3. United Nations’ peacekeeping operations**

As to be expected, due to China's security policy in Africa being mainly focused on peacekeeping operations and these operations having pivot to Africa (Benabdallah 2016, 25), it was evident from the beginning of the study that the reasons for establishing Djibouti military base would be closely related to the peacekeeping and the related activities. Thus, according to the data one of the main arguments for Chinese military base to be established is to better contribute to the UN peacekeeping operations (e.g. MFA 2015b & MFA 2017b). Apart from peacekeeping operations, the international operations include humanitarian rescue, ship escort, anti-piracy operations. The following quotes demonstrates accurately how China conveys its intentions:

“The completion and operation of the base will enable China to better perform the international obligations of the UN escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and Somali waters as well as humanitarian relief, --” (MFA 2017b).

“Established on July 11, the base was built to assist in humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts in Africa and west Asia. It's also able to engage in rescue missions and naval exercises”. (People's Daily 2017b.)

Opening the base for the peacekeeping missions on the basis of humanitarian aid is crucial in order to better negate the often-unfavorable image of China and the military base itself. China has been under accusations that its relationship with Africa is neocolonial, thus peacekeeping missions and permanent military base effectively respond to these accusations (Barton 2018, 420). Participation to the UN missions as well as the base provide permanent and solid actions proving China's non-economic intentions. Generally, China's peacekeeping efforts have been welcomed by the whole international community (Shinn & Eisenman 2012, 186). In addition, if Xi's promise to raise UN's standby forces to 8 000 personnel is materialized, the base could potentially be important part of harboring the troops in the area (Wang 2015). If materialized, given Africa's unstable security atmosphere that might change at any moment and if given a mandate, China could respond rapidly.

Now, when it comes to peacekeeping missions and their connection to the military base. In the data it is consistently applied that the base is somehow involved in peacekeeping. Duchâtel & Shelton-Duplaix (2018, 31) even identify how China refers to it as 'transit point' between missions and place of origin. Though, to this date it has never been reported that peacekeepers would have transited through the military base (Cabestan 2019, 10). As a matter of fact, there is no real need for transiting through the base as

there has never been one before either, thus the base is not necessary for peacekeeping missions. I argue that peacekeeping and humanitarian rescue are just used to justify and soften the opening of the base.

Interestingly, at the same time as China promises to increase its participation in anti-piracy operations in the Somali waters as well as in other international operations, China's neighboring country Japan, who has had a base in Djibouti since 2011, has been struggling with the exact opposite. The Japanese public has been vocally against the Japanese military base as during the past five years piracy attacks in the Somali waters have dropped to one or less incidents per year (Wagner 2020). Despite declining numbers of piracy attacks since 2015, Japan's Defense Ministry has decided to continue the operation of the base and even decided to expand to better counter Chinese presence in Africa (Fujiwara, 2018). Despite the non-existent piracy attacks the multilateral operations still continue but using this as pretext for military base seems farfetched.

## **4.2. Military**

The PLA has an important role in maintaining the Communist Party of China in power and it must pledge its absolute allegiance to the Communist Party (Shambaugh 2002, 11). While the PLA's role in supporting those in power is still heavily domestically tied, its role is undoubtedly growing as an important tool for China's foreign policy. In this sense, it has been crucial for China to incorporate the PLA as a part of foreign policy to ensure that the role given to the PLA is fitting with the already existing foreign policy and does not contradict it. If China fails incorporating the PLA and moreover its missions successfully, it will face criticism from international audience, and that would undermine China's cause. Thus, the reasons given for the opening are decisive in how the world projects the opening.

### **4.2.1. Support base or military base?**

In advance of the opening of the Djibouti base, Chinese leadership was well-prepared for the forthcoming criticism from international audience. Rumors of possible opening of the base had been circulating as early as 2011 (Lin & Li 2011), and every time when the topic of possible military base has risen, internationally voiced worries and criticism over the matter have been heard (e.g. Firstpost 2011). Taking into consideration that this was the first-time China was opening an overseas military base and tackling the criticism that would ensue, Chinese leadership have had to adopt new approaches and be prepared to respond efficiently to avoid backflash.

One of the strategies chosen by China has been to designate the military base as support base. At first, China used variety of different names to address the military base such a 'logistical facility' or 'logistics facility' but soon adopted 'logistics support base' or just shortly 'support base' (MFA 2015b & MFA 2017). Chinese officials have been strict and consistent to call the Djibouti base as logistical support base or the more commonly used short version which is support base. Although officially 'support facility' is still a preferred version in official occasions (Cabestan 2019, 7). Media outlets such as People's Daily and Global Times were quick to follow official line after the official confirmation was made public, but they most commonly refer to the base as support base (Wang 2015).

The name of the base might seem inconsequential, but it is used actively to differentiate Chinese military base from other foreign military bases or even from the concept of a military base overall. Either way, the difference is essential for China to rebut criticism it has received from Western media and to portray a softer image of itself. To better convey the message to international audiences, series of articles were published to explain the difference between China's military base and others. Global Times (Liu 2016) published the following to comment from Chinese military expert to illuminate the difference:

“Our base in Djibouti is not a military base. Unlike the US and Japan, our base has no weapons stores. It's a logistics supply base which offers food, fresh water, medicine, and relief materials like tents” (Liu 2016).

Global Times also quoted PLA Daily on the topic:

“According to a contract signed in December 2015, the base will be able to hold 10,000 people, charged with protecting the region's economic and business interests. It cannot, however, harbor any military ships, and it falls short on target, function and scale for being a military base” (Global Times 2016a).

Despite the significance of the distinction for China, Chinese officials have not wished to clearly define the actual differences other than stating that it will not harbor any tactical arms, nor does it have many of the tasks of fully functioning military base. Furthermore, the main task of the base is portrayed to be only to supply fuel and other supplies for escort missions and such (e.g. Sun 2017, Mo 2017 & MFA 2016a). From China's point of view, it is not an operational base, but more like a storage for supplies

and a resting spot. Regardless of China's efforts to soften their image and push everyone to use the name "support base", every single article, academic or media, refers to China's base as a military base and the negative attitudes of the Western press have not diminished significantly since the announcement of the military base.

Peculiarly, in similar manner but far more successfully, Japan, the country that officially does not have an operational army but has Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), has quietly opened a military base in Djibouti as mentioned briefly earlier. Initially, China modeled their base according to the Japan's defense facility and followed Japan's example of portraying it as a supply facility (Cabestan 2019, 6). However, Japan's base houses under 200 military personnel and they also participate in the anti-piracy operations which is a vast difference compared to China's base that can house up to 10 000 soldiers. Japan's base has been rather unnoticeable and barely no one outside of Japan is even aware of its existence despite Japan's controversial war history.

#### **4.2.2. Comparing to the United States and the West**

China's and the United States' power rivalry in all possible arenas is known for anyone who has read any newspapers recently. Each side attempts to come in first over the other in all possible arenas from innovation to science, except world hegemony which China claims to be not interested (e.g. Global Times 2015a). This said, Chinese media has a distinct way of comparing itself and the United States and other powerful countries. In some cases, it is rather reasonable and elaborating but more often it just seems a little unnecessary.

As stated earlier, China has been fast to point out how their military base is not to be compared with other foreign ones. This is highlighted in many statements and articles by pointing out how the United States' Camp Lemonier and the other foreign military bases in Djibouti house strategic weapons and conduct military training which is something that the Chinese military base will not do (Liu 2017 & People's Daily 2016a). Global Times (2017a) article entitled as "PLA Djibouti base must be viewed objectively" elaborates how China differentiates itself from others:

"However, this base is different from the overseas military bases of other big countries. For example, the US' military bases overseas are usually tasked with maintaining a military presence and military deterrence for the region and serve to support US hegemony around the world. The US has stationed 4,000 military

personnel in Djibouti, and deployed P-3C patrol aircraft and F-16 fighter jets there. It is a military outpost for the US to exert influence on Africa. -- The US military base in Diego Garcia focuses on the Indian Ocean and projects deterrent effects for a wider area. Owning this kind of overseas base is beyond China's scope for this generation. The West shouldn't speculate this way". (Global Times 2017a.)

Statements, like the one above, are essential for China to ensure that their policy of peaceful development is getting through to all parties involved. This is not only an important message to Western nations but might be even more important to African leaders. I claim that through this message China seeks to assure African leaders that China will stay away from African affairs unlike its rival the United States. This continues the discourse of distinguishing China and African nations from the West and portraying itself as true friend of Africa. This way China places itself as the advocate of developing countries against the West and portrays itself as a trustworthy partner. The following quote is from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regular press conference:

“It is reported that the US have hundreds of military bases around the globe as well as over ten aircraft carriers and its military spending will keep increasing, yet at the same time it makes irresponsible remarks on and finds fault with China's normal national defense building. This reminds us of a Chinese idiom "the high-handed magistrates are free to burn down houses, while the common people are forbidden even to light lamps", which is out-and-out double standard.” (MFA 2017c.)

While China has been claiming that there are fundamental differences between Chinese and the rest of the military bases, the reality is conflicting. As it stands today, Chinese base might not be the largest in size, but it can house up 10 000 soldiers and officers which makes it the largest military base in manpower in Djibouti (Barton 2018, 425). At the moment, there are around 2 000 Chinese soldiers stationed in the base (Cabestan 2019,7). This number far surpasses the troops stationed in Italian and Japanese military bases. In addition, Chinese base's original pier has been renovated to better answer the needs of the PLAN (Liu & Yin 2018) and now it can harbor any PLAN ship (Chan 2017). In addition, according to satellite pictures China has been building a secret 23 000 square meter underground basement in the premises and it has become heavily fortified (Headley 2018). It is still a mystery what is it used for. Initially presented as a modest 'logistical support' and even 'dual facility', China's naval base is an actual full

fledge military and naval base (Cabestan 2019, 8). After the accounts of the specialists on the field (e.g. Barton 2018 & Cabestan 2019), it is rather clear that China's efforts to name the base as merely a support base has been only to better adjust and fit foreign policy needs. Thus, it can be concluded that China's Djibouti base is an actual military base comparable to any other military base in Djibouti.

#### **4.2.3. China's history in the Somali waters and practical challenges**

Initially, when the speculations over the possible opening of the first military base started, Chinese officials were fast to point out that Chinese military had already *established* itself in the region since 2008 (e.g. MFA 2015b, Yuan 2016 & Ai 2016). This was then continuously reiterated in the data by presenting the numbers of missions conducted in the area. The mission numbers shown were presented in similar manner as China places itself historically in Africa discussed in Chapter 3. In this manner China grounds its commitment and presence in the area.

Nonetheless, the years of presence or 'history in the waters' lay the groundwork for the military base. *De facto*, many articles stated how the PLA had been struggling to refuel and replenish soldiers due to not having their own base (e.g. MFA 2015b, People's Daily 2016a & Global Times 2016a). One mission to Horn of Africa can last up to 120 days and that is a long time to stay in the sea without proper resting facilities (People's Daily 2016a). Struggles seem to be legitimate, as in 2010 when the French forces had to rescue Chinese sailors from the sea after an engine failure (Chan 2019). Nevertheless, struggles were reiterated in almost every article and statement and they often emphasized the wellbeing of soldiers was at stake. The following is from Ministry of Foreign Affairs press conference (MFA 2015b):

“In accordance with relevant UN resolutions, China has deployed over 60 vessels to the Gulf of Aden and the waters off the Somali coast in 21 escort missions since 2008. In the process of escorting, we encountered real difficulties in replenishing soldiers and resupplying fuel and food and found it really necessary to have nearby and efficient logistical support”. (MFA 2015b.)

The issues China have had during their naval missions sound legitimate and logical, and no doubt that the military base will be helpful in order to better supply and replenish PLA forces in the region. However, what the articles fail to inform is that China have

had to have longstanding agreement with Djibouti for naval port visits and that the PLAN have had regular port visits in Djibouti since 2003 (Duchâtel & Duplaix 2018, 6).

### **4.3. Win-win cooperation**

As already discussed in the earlier chapters, Chinese foreign policy in Africa is tightly connected to its economic policies and in this sense, it is not startling that to China its military base in Djibouti is closely embedded to its economic interests. While economic reasons were not emphasized as much as the previous themes in the data, I claim that the economic interests are as important as the previous ones. The following chapter has been divided into two parts: one contributing Chinese interests and the second one contributing to Djibouti's interests.

#### **4.3.2. Protection of Chinese interests**

According to research results, China's growing interests in Africa was one of the starting catalysts for establishing military base in Djibouti (Ai 2016). Over the years, Africa's rich natural resources have attracted state-owned and private Chinese businesses to establish themselves in all parts of Africa. While many of them are in areas that other businesses have shunned away due to security concerns or deemed it too insufficiently cost-effective, some companies have had to invest in countries and areas out of political reasons (Barton 2018, 415). Rewards have been high but so have been the risks as well. According to some estimates, there could be even around one million Chinese in Africa (The Economist 2013) and with forever expanding businesses the amount could be even higher.

Apart from protecting Chinese civilians, Chinese interests also include the commercial interests themselves, BRI projects and valuable shipments between African and China. With military base presence, it is evident that China is now keen to show its capability of protecting both its citizens as well as commercial interests (Barton 2018, 416). As China's interests in Africa and in the region grow, the base will become essential part of the logistical network. Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi commented on the sidelines of the annual session of national congress in 2016 the following:

“China is trying to build necessary infrastructure and logistical capacities in regions with a concentration of China's interests, which is reasonable, logical

and consistent with international practices. -- Rather we want to pioneer the Chinese way of protecting overseas interests, one that is in tune with the trend of the times and welcomed by other parties”. (People’s Daily 2016b.)

The following statement is commonly used in the data and it highlights how China needs to better protect their assets:

“Between the western edge of the Gulf of Aden and the entrance to the Red Sea, connecting the Indian Ocean with the Mediterranean Sea, Djibouti serves as a crucial point in China's "One Belt and One Road" initiative. China is investing billions of dollars into construction projects in the country, including railways, airports and harbors. Establishing a support facility there meets the need to safeguard Beijing's own interests”. (Ai 2016.)

As China’s stakes in Africa get higher, so does the country’s pressure to prove that it can protect its citizens and interests. If China fails to do so, it will undermine Chinese Communist Party regime’ legitimacy and even more so if it needs to rely on other powers (Pham 2013, 45). In addition, insecurity in the continent would seriously hamper businesses’ enthusiasm to operate in the unstable areas of Africa. Fears are not unprecedented as there has been numerous threats and incidents involving Chinese nationals (Barton 2018, 415). Most recently, three Chinese nationals died in a mine attack in the Democratic Republic of Congo in April 2020 (Reuters 2020).

#### **4.3.3. Economic benefits for Djibouti**

While the following arguments are not direct reasons that China have used as reasoning for the establishing of a military base, they are still relevant part for understanding of how China perceives and connects its military base to wider foreign policy making. While these arguments are less used, they still have an important message. These arguments also provide interesting insights to China’s public diplomacy that aims to maintain only positive image of China (Hartig 2016, 661). As China’s economic interests in Africa and Djibouti are important for China, I argue that China portrays the military base as sort of “business booster” with a mission to advance business between China and Djibouti. Thus, the research results reveal that China connects the military base with deepening business opportunities between the two countries (Hu 2017, Hu 2016 & People’s Daily 2017a). Foreign Ministry’s spokesperson Geng Shuang goes as far as to say that the new military base will enhance Djibouti’s economic and social development (MFA 2017b). In addition, Global Times article even hints that since

Djibouti has already Western military bases in the country, so in order to better attract foreign investments, Djibouti should diversify its partners to attract more foreign investments (Hu 2016). This is a clear indication to other countries considering letting China to open military base on their ground that a Chinese base on the ground brings investments to the host country and thus has far more positive outcomes than negative ones. Later after the opening of the base, Global Times (Li 2018) published an interview with local businessman to confirm the new arrival of businesses to Djibouti:

“Since the Chinese Navy established the base in Djibouti last summer, more Chinese companies have come to the country to do business, Ahmed Mohamed Arab, an investment and marketing official at the East Africa Bank. When investing in a foreign country, security is always a big concern. China's first overseas logistic base in Djibouti gives Chinese businessmen more confidence in making long-term investment," Arab said. We also felt more secure and confident to do business with Chinese companies because they are well taken care of in the country," he added”. (Li 2018.)

The connection between blossoming business between China and Djibouti due to military base seem unorthodox, but for China it is relevant to present the possible positive effects of having a base in country. It seems that as the Djibouti base will hardly stay as the only Chinese overseas military base in the future, the positive effects observed in Djibouti might help China in future negotiations with other countries when considering opening a base.

Lastly, the special relation between China and Djibouti goes hardly unnoticed from anyone who follows China-Djibouti relations. Throughout the data, it is indicated that the military base is a direct result of “friendly relations between China and Djibouti” (e.g. MFA 2015b, MFA 2017b & Zhang 2017) as mentioned earlier. Below statement summarizes it well:

“China and Djibouti enjoy traditional friendship. Friendly cooperation between the two sides has achieved constant growth over recent years, with practical cooperation carried out in various field” (MFA 2015a).

There seems to be distinct reasons for “friendly relations” to be emphasized so frequently. Firstly, the wording suggests the equal nature of relations between China and Djibouti which tries to demonstrate that China has not coerced Djibouti to allow a Chinese military base on its territory and that the military base is a natural consequence

of the long-lasting relationship. It is essential for China's Africa policy that no matter size of the country, every country is treated equally. Secondly, China's actions in the continent has been plagued and accused of severe corruption (Knowledge@Wharton 2019). While China has *not* been accused of buying Djibouti's military cooperation, it seems that China wants to assure its intentions are not seen in this light. Global Times elaborates on the topic the following:

“China's support base in Djibouti is of course an important component of China's friendship with Djibouti, but the main direction of bilateral ties is economic cooperation, which has always been overlooked by Western observers. China has no intention of using its investment as bait in exchange for military cooperation, --”. (Hu 2017.)

For a small poor country, Djibouti has landed a quite a number of large projects with the financing help of China. In addition, large part of them have only started after the PLAN started to take part in anti-piracy mission and started to do regular port calls in Djibouti (Cabestan 2019, 2). While it might seem likely, that there is a relation between economic investments and the military base deal with China, it is something that is not possible to speculate merely on articles or past Chinese dealings in Africa. Nevertheless, Djibouti is a clearly benefitting from China-Djibouti relations with largescale infrastructure projects and long list of other projects as well.

## **5. Discussion**

In the previous analysis chapter, I introduced the main findings of this study. While the previous chapter introduced the data in a more detailed manner, the aim of this chapter is to widen the topic and create wider connections between the themes and findings as well as with China's foreign policy. Most importantly it will be determined how well the findings correspond with the remaining two research questions. One of the reasons why the case study, as a research design, was chosen was its premise of open angle towards the data. This enabled to conduct study without prior established themes or any guiding structures. In the start of the study it was not evident how the research would progress as there were no prior results or expectations to be compared with. As China's first overseas military base in Djibouti is still not well-researched topic and there is no comparable research done with similar data, thus the results can be described as unique in themselves but as witnessed in the previous chapter the findings are actually closely aligned with the themes of China's foreign policy. This was not intended result at all but themes and subcategories, quite obviously and naturally, had a strong correlation with China's foreign policy.

### **5.1. Growing military presence in Africa**

There are varying reasons for China to push for such an active policy in Africa although the most prominent reason being the economic one. With China's competitive win-win co-operation China has won over African leaders and increased its business opportunities. With the growing number of Chinese citizens in Africa protecting the assets and citizens in Africa is a much larger task than the Chinese government probably initially anticipated. The stakes are high for China, who has pushed companies to enter unstable business environments that are potentially unstable and sometimes even dangerous.

As shown in the analysis chapter, the reasoning for the opening of the military base from a military perspective is conflicting. First of all, according to the data one of the main arguments of opening the base has been the notion that the Djibouti base is actually only a support base. Belittling the purpose of the base and giving conflicting statements of the reasons behind the establishment are meant to direct the opinions of the readers and the rest of the world. In other words, it is to soften the image and impact

of opening a military base. This sort of “image control” is not a new technique to China, although its positive results will stretch only to certain extent and with more military bases in the future, it will be more difficult to employ again. Unlike in China, the international audience, and especially Western one, is accustomed to do the evaluating themselves and do not necessarily take everything in a face value, especially when coming from a foreign government. China needs to be more aware of how potentially damaging this sort of discourse is for building the basis for responsible power, if that is what China truly desires to be.

Thus, continuing with the discourse of “Djibouti base is only support base” seems futile as there are no significant differences between an actual military base and Chinese support base. Djibouti base has already all the capabilities that a “real” military base has, and the base can house up to 10 000 men which makes it potentially the largest military base in Djibouti. With the already finished upgrades of the docking area, the only “missing” aspect of the base, is the lack of long landing strip for military planes, the existing one is only suitable for drones and helicopters. From this perspective, it is correct to determine that the Chinese base is an actual military base that is capable of conducting military operations similarly to any other military base in Djibouti or anywhere else.

Another important observation that needs to be noted is how all the official statements and the data overall seem to avert away from discussing China’s future aspirations connected with the base and the possibilities that the base is giving for military purposes. Naturally, some of this information would not be disclosed for the public but even general remarks would ease the tensions and correct the conceptions that the military base has brought out. To begin with, the strategic position of Djibouti is the reason why the number of other military bases in the area is high so there is no denying that China would have not chosen it for the same reasons as any other country in Djibouti. Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that China’s participation in anti-piracy operations regularly has proven to be difficult without a military base in the region and in this sense Djibouti as a location is reasonable. Although with the decline of piracy activity in the region, China might need to adjust their reasoning if they want to use piracy for reasoning for its presence in the region.

Based on this study it is probable that China will open more military bases in the future as well. As mentioned earlier Africa is working as a testing ground in a sense for China to further develop its policies. With a similar line of thought, China is now experimenting on how to operate a military base and how to handle it diplomatically without further angering the international audience. Finally, the most important is how to fit the military base in the discourse of non-interference and the larger frame of foreign policy. Choosing Africa as the first location of the base, was a wise decision from strategic point of view. It is well known that at the moment Africa, with its long-lasting wars and growing terrorism threats, is the most tumultuous continent. This has resulted in a situation where most of the active UN peacekeeping operations (PKO) are in Africa. Thus, justifying the military base location in Africa with China's active participation in PKO is reasonable, even if at the moment the base is actually not used for the operations. Opening the base with similar reasoning in the future will be harder as there is no similarly convenient location at hand apart from opening another one in some part of Africa.

## **5.2. The role of global actor**

While China is facing the difficult task of persuading the international audience of its peaceful intentions, country's actions, not only in Africa but also throughout Asia, have been under a microscope. China's actions especially in the South China Sea have led to widening mistrust between China and the rest of the world. As a balancing force for the negative image it has gained, China has invested heavily in its contributions for UN peacekeeping operations which are undeniably important and should not be discredited. Participating in the peace operations is a great objective if China truly wants to become a responsible global actor. Sending peacekeepers on missions has its own risks but in the case of China the benefits outdo the risks which have been greatly appreciated by the UN. Thus, from China's point of view the country's active support of peacekeeping operations is seen as an answer for the demands of the international audience and especially an answer for the demands of the African nations. Clearly, this was not enough for China and military base was needed. Certainly, the growing demands of the international audience did not demand opening a military base. Naturally, only time will truly tell what the underlying reasons for establishing the base were but most certainly building -yet- another military base in already demanding military environment is complicating the situation in the Horn of Africa.

To become a global actor China needs to do more. Contributing to peacekeeping is not enough to claim a global player role as when the role grows larger more difficult issues will come forth. In those cases, just offering economic support will not be enough to solve the complicated issues in different countries with different cultures. To become truly a responsible actor, China needs to make some radical changes to its policies. Transparency is something where it would be easy to start with. Whether it is soft loans or the underlying reasons for the military base, the cloud of mystery is still surrounding many of China's actions which then hinder China's goal of claiming the seat of a responsible actor. With more transparent actions, international circles would be more understanding towards China.

The non-interference policy is evidently changing and transforming that can be seen in China's actions in Africa. While it is unlikely that China will abandon the non-interference policy anytime soon, it can be predicted that its definition has already extended from its original meaning, the military base itself is a proof of that. While China tries its best to maintain that everything is *business as usual*, the reality is far from the neutral atmosphere China aims to create. From this perspective China's growing role in the world is alarming as no one can accurately know what China's ultimate long-term goals are.

On the other hand, there is China's win-win co-operation that is still one of the driving forces behind China's Africa policy. Connecting the military base with China's economic interests was intriguing. The protection of Chinese interests was mentioned in multiples entries although the question still remains that how the protection of interests would happen in reality. Rescue missions and anti-piracy operations apart there is little space where China can maneuver, if let's say rebels attack a Chinese mine and take hostages which is a feasible scenario. Nevertheless, as the number of Chinese citizens and business grow, the need for even symbolic presence and protection of interests is necessary to satisfy citizens' concerns. More importantly, the connection between economic interests and security seems strong in China. If economic interests work as solid reasoning for a military base, the next new location of the possible military base could be anywhere as China's economic relations extend to all parts of the world.

### 5.3. Conflicting policies

At the start of this study, there were no pre-established themes nor categories to compare with although it was soon apparent that in the end the themes were closely connected with already existing themes of China's foreign policy. My presumptions were not correct and certain themes that felt obvious and important at the beginning were not relevant in the end. It was surprising how closely the whole opening a military base overseas has just followed the already settled path of China's foreign policy. Then again, why would it not? The responses of the Foreign Ministry were deliberated and neutral and left little for speculation. They repeated the same formula from almost word to word when the topic of the military base was brought out. Commonly occurring outbursts during weekly press conferences were kept at a minimum and it seemed that the topic was almost muted in some sense. According to my previous experience of China, typically when China has something important to announce in any way possible it is quite common that to the topic is brought out consistently. In this case, there were plenty of articles, but they felt much shorter and less opinionated compared to some typical announcement of "progress" that was made by China. Maybe this was due to the lack of available information because of the sensitivity of the topic or maybe it was due to less unwanted negative opinions. Especially surprising was the rather neutral writing style of Global Times which is notorious of its bigoted pieces.

It is clear that the policy and reality of the military base in Djibouti are quite different. While China has attempted to avert from excessive publicizing of the base and diverting opinions of the public, it tries to cover the fact it is a full-blown military base. What I suggest is that if one solely relies on the official statements it might seem that military base is there to actually bring peace to Africa when in reality it is much more. What the opening of the base has exposed, is how China faces some challenges within its own policies which it has yet to resolve. The whole concept of China having an overseas military base is evidently not very fitting with China's most important policy of non-interference and only naming the base with a different name will not diminish the role foreign military base has within a foreign country. The opening of the base is further evidence for the change in China's foreign policy that everyone has been witnessing for already a long period of time.

According to my predictions, the incompatibility of China's foreign policy and security policy will continue to grow in the future as more bases will appear. China's Djibouti base is a clear indication that China is not only changing its security policy but most importantly its foreign policy as well. As China continues to defend military installments with the pretext of non-interference, the policy might eventually lose its meaning altogether. When it does, hopefully by then the now conflicting identity of China will be clearer and more defined. Opening of the base was a decisive point in the development of China's foreign policy and the reasonable success of it going under radar has most probably boosted the assertiveness of China. It will be seen later in the future if China's Djibouti base will be a prototype of future bases.

## 6. Conclusion

China's transformation from one of the poorest countries in the world to the powerhouse it is today has been nothing short of remarkable. While country's economic achievements are exceptional, its actions on the foreign policy arena have left some researchers to question the motives behind China's actions. After Party Secretary Xi Jinping took the position of the highest officer of the country, China's traditional role as a mere observer have changed to a proactive participant in the world politics. China's transformation have been keenly observed all around the world and much have already been written about it. The topic of rising China is debated vigorously and with this research I wanted to participate in the wider the debate on China's changing foreign policy. To better understand the changes of the policy, a case study of the establishment of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti was chosen. Djibouti base is an excellent example of China's newfound assertiveness as well as it demonstrates the change that is taking place within China's foreign policy. While there is no doubt about the importance attach to it, due to its relative newness there are hardly any academic works about the topic.

The aim of this study has been to answer three research questions. Firstly, how does China reason the opening of its first overseas military base in Djibouti. Secondly, how does the reasoning project China's changing foreign policy and finally, what possible implications it might have for the future. In order to answer these questions, case study was chosen as research design and the data was progressed with qualitative content analysis. Case study as a research design allowed the study to be conducted without prior themes or categories. This gave an open-minded angle for the study and led to less biased results. The official statements from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were chosen as the primary data for the research. In addition, due to the limited number of official statements, articles from People's Daily and Global Times were also added as primary sources. Both of these newspapers are strongly connected to the Communist Party of China and thus they present the official party policy. The addition of People's Daily and Global Times articles brought more nuanced data that correlated with the goals of the study perfectly. While the results of the content analysis were unique in themselves, the results still closely followed the established discourse of China's foreign policy. The analysis resulted in three different themes from which the focal points of the results and China's foreign policy were discovered. The results yielded sometimes conflicting

reasoning which displayed the active change China is going through within its policy making.

Firstly, for China the military is closely knitted with its policy of non-interference and the military base is debated to be a step towards of becoming a responsible actor in global affairs and a vital part of its peacekeeping operations. This result showed how China intends to build an image of protector of world peace by increasing its presence in Africa and the wider area. Reassuring that China's non-interference policy is still relevant even after building military base in overseas portrayed to be challenging. Convincing the relevance of non-interference is vital for China to gain trust of the international community and its key partners. Secondly, due to the conflict between the non-interference policy and establishing a military base, China has resulted to downplay the usage of the military base by calling the base as a support base. Claims of support base were supported by China's claims of difference between Chinese and Western military bases. In reality, there are no significant differences between Chinese and Western military bases. Thirdly, China connects the base closely with its economic interests in Africa. While the connection is ambiguous, through the base China aims to protect its citizens and economic interests. At the moment this is mainly achieved through rescue missions and peacekeeping work. On the other hand, according to China the base brings new business opportunities to Djibouti and helps with the development of Djibouti.

Overall, the opening of a military base has resulted in considerable amount of negative reactions which has pushed China to attempt to control how the world, and especially Western world, views China's actions. This has been achieved by distorting the reasoning of the base and blurring the lines of military instalment and peacekeeping operations center. China's aim of becoming a responsible actor was favorably used to justify the base. At the moment, it seems that combining military advancement and non-interference policy is conflicting while China explores its new more assertive foreign policy. Despite the past and current actions, it seems unlikely that China would abandon the non-interference policy altogether but certainly the meaning of it has and will further develop in the future. What can be taken from this study is that the Djibouti base is only a testing place for Chinese style military base and most probably there will be more bases in the future. While a military base itself does not prove that China will one day start to seek hegemony, the military base's existence cannot be just shrugged off or

understated. According to my predictions, the incompatibility of China's foreign policy and security policy will continue to grow in the future as more bases will eventually appear.

While the results of this study have been satisfactory more study is needed to get more comprehensive take on the topic. A clearly missing part of this study is the military perspective which would have yielded in more nuanced results. Thus, the addition of the original China's Ministry of National Defense's press releases might bring out different outcome which at the moment are no longer available. Also, adding PLA's official media sources would have been interesting as well. On the other hand, doing comparison between English language and Chinese language sources might have brought entirely different aspect to the topic. Acquiring any different type of sources for the study, other than news media, would be challenging due to the topic's sensitivity.

The topic of Chinese military base will certainly be vital in years to come. I am personally interested to see how China copes and adjusts its reasoning in the case of future bases considering how Djibouti has had many advantages compared to other locations. In similar manner the development, or the change, of the non-interference policy is going to be critical and have wide ranging effects on world politics. While China's assertiveness grows, its foreign policy will adopt to much larger demands. When these changes take place, world should be better prepared.

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