

Extended Range

China Upgrades Its Military Base in Djibouti

SUMMARY

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Since mid-2024, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has added two **communications facilities at its overseas base in Djibouti**, strengthening its ability to operate far from home and likely enhancing its ability to collect signals intelligence (SIGINT) across the Middle East and Africa.

- The larger southeastern site features three 30-meter high-frequency (HF) antennas, two very/ultra-high-frequency (VHF/UHF) antennas, three mobile satellite communications (SATCOM) dishes, four probable 5G arrays, and a radome enclosing an unknown asset.
- The northwestern site includes two crossed dipole HF antennas. Reinforced cable trenches laid in 2025 suggest room for further expansion.



Capabilities of Newly Observed Antennas

The observed equipment at the PLA Support Base in Djibouti supports several communications functions and potentially intelligence collection.

Asset	Bands/Range	Communications Role	Potential SIGINT Role
Crossed dipole HF antennas (~30 m)	3–30 MHz. regional to intercontinental range	Beyond-line-of-sight links using ionospheric refraction.	HF interception and direction-finding. Spatially separated antennas could improve geolocation. Performance is unconfirmed.
VHF/UHF antennas	~30 MHz–3 GHz. Typically ranging tens of km	Local tactical voice and data links.	Possible interception and direction-finding of nearby emitters, but limited to line of sight.
Mobile SATCOM dishes	X / C / Ku	High-capacity links to national command, independent of fiber. Multiple positions may support simultaneous links.	Possible interception of downlinks within covered bands. Steerable mounts provide link flexibility. Collection is unconfirmed.
Probable 5G arrays	Sub-6 GHz and/or mmWave. Very short range	High-speed wireless voice and data coverage on base.	Nearby wireless monitoring is hypothetical. The configuration favors on-base communications. Collection is unlikely.
Radome	Unknown	Protects and conceals an enclosed antenna.	Configuration is consistent with weather or tactical SATCOM. Could support intelligence collection, but function mains unidentified.

Source: CSIS.

The two new facilities very likely operate together as one base-wide command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) architecture. They provide redundant links to Chinese ships and aircraft as well as command headquarters in China. They also likely support monitoring regional military activity. While military communications are encrypted, the PLA's collection of signals' origins, frequencies, and transmission patterns can provide valuable insights into nearby military operations.

Djibouti sits beside the Gulf of Aden and Bab al-Mandeb Strait, with U.S., French, Italian, and Japanese bases less than 10 miles from the developing PLA support base. Recent conflicts around the Red Sea and wider Middle East, along with China's expanding interests in Africa, have increased the intelligence value of this location. The upgrades give the PLA a more persistent picture of the regional operating environment and support more complex operations far from China.

Read the full analysis and satellite imagery at [CSIS.org](https://www.csis.org).