

# THE FLAG LAGS BUT FOLLOWS

## The PLA and China's Great Leap Outward

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**D**oes trade follow the flag, or does the flag follow trade? In China's "reform and opening" policy, the sequence appears to be first trade, then investment in resources and infrastructure—now codified under the so-called One Belt, One Road (OBOR) or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—followed by efforts to protect the physical manifestations of extended engagement with the outside world. While "trade follows the flag" may have been "a reasonable maxim for 19<sup>th</sup>-century imperialism," it does not appear to be a viable course of action for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century great power in a globalized world economy.<sup>1</sup>

Since the late 1970s, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been engaged in a sustained economic outreach to the world beyond its borders, initially focused mostly on its immediate neighborhood, but eventually extending far beyond the Asia-Pacific region. In contrast to the most ambitious economic development policy initiative of the first three decades of the PRC, the Great Leap Forward, China's most ambitious economic development policy initiative since then constitutes a Great Leap Outward.<sup>2</sup> While the former effort was autarkic and internally focused, the latter effort is global in scope and projected externally. Moreover, while the earlier effort was a

catastrophic failure and abandoned 3 years after its launch, the more recent effort has been a stunning success sustained for four decades and counting.

This chapter first examines possible options available to protect what have been labeled China's overseas interests—a category of national interests that has become much more meaningful because of the successes of Beijing's ongoing Great Leap Outward. Second, it analyzes People's Liberation Army (PLA) thinking about the security dimensions of OBOR and the role of the armed forces.<sup>3</sup> Third, this chapter considers three case studies to explore what securing China's overseas interests involves in concrete terms. Finally, it summarizes the findings and their implications. Before proceeding, we briefly discuss Chinese national interests and summarize the phases of China's Great Leap Outward.

Much attention has focused on China's core interests but far less on China's overseas interests. The former category of national interests has understandably drawn considerable focus because when China designates interests as core, this means they are considered worth fighting and dying for—such as the PRC's sovereignty claims over Taiwan. But Beijing's overseas interests have grown in importance and are now routinely identified as important interests to be protected. For example, they are mentioned in China's defense white papers and elsewhere. Overseas interests include—but are not limited to—PRC citizens living, working, and traveling abroad, as well as PRC property and investments located abroad. President Jiang Zemin announced the “going out” strategy in 2002, and his successor Hu Jintao gave the PLA four “new historic missions” in 2004, including protecting China's expanding interests. The Chinese military's strategic guidelines were revised that same year (the first revision since 1994) to include “threats to overseas interests” as a primary threat for the first time.<sup>4</sup> The volume and strategic significance of this category of national interests have expanded considerably since Xi Jinping officially launched OBOR in two major speeches in 2013.

The PRC's prolonged Great Leap Outward has moved through three discernible phrases. It began as a quest to sell Chinese exports to the developed

world, which stimulated demand for commodities and raw materials from the developing world. Gradually, China's initial heavy focus on exports to the developed world broadened to include greater attention to the developing world. This second phase saw China starting to invest and build infrastructure in the countries of the Asia-Pacific, Middle East, Africa, and Latin America in support of trade and investment in these regions. A third phase emerged as Beijing started to recognize that since many parts of the developing world are unstable and vulnerable to a range of threats, it was necessary to figure out how to protect PRC citizens, investments, and Chinese-built infrastructure around the globe.

### **Options for Protecting China's Overseas Interests**

The PRC's expanding overseas interests have prompted a lively discourse about how best to protect them. At least five ways have been identified. China could:

- continue to free ride on the coattails of other countries
- rethink its aversion to alliances
- reassess its policy of not posting military forces in bases abroad
- enhance the nascent power projection capabilities of the PLA
- outsource the protection of its overseas interests to host countries or private contractors.

#### **Free Riding**

To date, Beijing's primary means of protecting overseas interests have been to rely on the kindness of acquaintances. Certainly, this is not China's preferred option, but given the severe limitations of the PLA and other instruments of national power in past decades, Beijing has had little alternative but to look to other great powers, especially the United States, for help. Indeed, China has been free riding on the U.S. Navy since the 1980s and more recently on the U.S. Army in places like Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. Navy has been actively patrolling the sea lanes of the world's oceans and in

the process protecting not only U.S. commercial vessels but also the flagged vessels of other countries, including China. But China would prefer not to depend on the altruism of the United States; indeed, Beijing is suspicious of U.S. intentions and worries that if bilateral relations sour and conflict looms, then Washington would restrict or block access to PRC commercial vessels. The so-called Malacca Dilemma is about both China's heavy reliance on one narrow shipping channel and Beijing's perceived vulnerability to blockade by the U.S. Navy. Consequently, there is an active and ongoing discourse about possible alternatives to protecting China's citizens and assets, whether on the high seas or land.

### **Rethinking Alliances**

After decades of insisting that China does not “do alliances,” in recent years, Chinese scholars and analysts have been debating the pros and cons of having allies. Moreover, although the PRC has strongly criticized the U.S. alliance system in Asia and Chinese elites have generally avoided advocating for China adopting similar formal security arrangements, Beijing has developed closer security cooperation with other countries.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, if an alliance is defined as “a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states,” then China may already have allies.<sup>7</sup>

North Korea stands out as a *sui generis* case of a Chinese “ally.” Formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), North Korea is China's only official treaty ally as of 2017. The official alliance was established by the 1961 Treaty of Mutual Friendship signed between Beijing and Pyongyang. However, the security and military-to-military components of the bilateral relationship have long been essentially nonexistent, and more recently political ties have soured.<sup>8</sup> In short, 21<sup>st</sup>-century military ties between the PRC and DPRK look nothing like a functioning alliance (ironically, China acted like a real ally prior to the penning of the treaty—in the 1950s when Chinese forces fought side by side with the DPRK Korean People's Army during the Korean War). In fact, in 2017 China has

a far more robust bilateral security relationship with Pakistan and a more vibrant multilateral security relationship with the member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, including Russia (see below).

One of the leading proponents of more formalized security relationships for the PRC is Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University. Professor Yan has argued that “China should consider having military bases in countries it considers allies,” but acknowledges that this may be in the distant future because the “Chinese government [unfortunately] insists on a nonaligned principle. . . . The major obstacle to China abandoning its nonaligned principle is years of propaganda criticizing alliances as part of a Cold War mentality.”<sup>9</sup> Discounting the argument that China’s lack of alliances is due to a weak military, Yan framed his support for alliances as befitting a great power: “China has become the world’s second-largest power, and the nonaligned principle no longer serves its interests.” However, Yan does not think that China’s OBOR project will lead to a fundamental transformation of partners into official treaty allies: “I don’t think China’s One Belt, One Road initiative for economic development across Eurasia can fundamentally change the nature of the relations.” He believes that China’s embracing of alliances would not drive another Cold War but rather improve U.S.-China relations because the “more allies China makes, the more balanced and stable the relationship will be. The more China shies away from alliances, the greater the chance that Washington will contain China, therefore resulting in an unstable relationship.” Clearly, some in China are rethinking alliances.

But if China were to select a 21<sup>st</sup>-century military ally, the most likely candidate would be Pakistan or Russia; both countries have proven records of extended strategic cooperation with China. Chinese leaders are deeply distrustful of outsiders and other states and trust takes time to develop.

Pakistan is one of the few countries that has been able to sustain good relations with China across multiple decades.<sup>10</sup> From Beijing’s perspective, Islamabad has shown itself to be a trusted partner both during the Cold War and after. From Pakistan’s perspective, China has proved itself to be an

“all-weather” friend. Moreover, neither country has any good alternatives for trustworthy strategic partners in the tumultuous neighborhoods of South and Central Asia. Thus, while Beijing has never fought side by side with Islamabad or directly come to Pakistan’s aid in any of its serial conflicts with India, China has provided considerable conventional military assistance, critical support for Islamabad’s nuclear program, and the PLA has sustained interactions with Pakistan’s armed forces over many decades.

Russia is another logical potential ally for China, but this alliance option comes with heavy baggage for each country. Both Beijing and Moscow are undoubtedly wary of entering another alliance because of the fate of their 20<sup>th</sup>-century effort. The newly established PRC looked to its socialist elder brother—the Soviet Union—for military support and economic aid. Months after formally establishing a new communist party-state in China, Mao Zedong traveled to Moscow to meet with Joseph Stalin and sign the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance in February 1950. But a decade later, the alliance fractured because of ideological differences, political tensions, and personality conflicts between two headstrong leaders.<sup>11</sup> These fundamental tensions persist today. Indeed, as one Chinese analyst opined, China and Russia will not cement a 21<sup>st</sup>-century alliance unless driven to do so by the United States.<sup>12</sup> A scholar at the China Academy of Social Sciences wrote in 2016 that he could find “no evidence supporting the possibility or necessity of a China-Russia military alliance.”<sup>13</sup> The expert highlighted the absence of any contributing factors, including lack of a clear direct military threat (from the United States), major differences between Chinese and Russia national interests, and fundamental skepticism that even a formal treaty would guarantee that one country would come to the aid of the other in the event of an attack by a third country.

Moreover, nothing in official PRC rhetoric suggests that Beijing might pursue a military alliance in the near future. President Xi’s May 2014 speech to the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia made clear that China opposes the U.S. alliance system in Asia.<sup>14</sup>

Referring to U.S. alliances, the Chinese leader stated, “One cannot live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the outdated thinking from the age of Cold War and zero-sum game. . . . [T]o beef up and entrench a military alliance targeted at a third party is not conducive to maintaining common security.” Instead, he advocated that security cooperation must be “universal . . . equal . . . [and] inclusive” and that China needs “to innovate [its] security concept, establish a new regional security cooperation architecture, and jointly build a road for security of Asia that is shared by and win-win to all.” Reflecting a regional security order that excluded the United States, Xi concluded that “it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia, and uphold the security of Asia.” Speaking in September 2017, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson clarified China’s interest in partnerships over alliances: “We advocate that regional countries should make joint efforts to engage in dialogue instead of confrontation, forge partnerships instead of alliances, and build an Asia-Pacific partnership featuring mutual trust, inclusiveness, and mutually beneficial cooperation.”<sup>15</sup> Such strident rhetorical positioning leaves little room for China to enter into a formal alliance.

Yet at least some of China’s relationships with other states are starting to resemble alliances, and just because China does not call something an alliance does not mean that it may not be or become one. But for Chinese leaders and analysts, the term *alliance* has negative connotations because it is seen as denoting a security relationship between two states that targets a third state. Indeed, China tends to be both critical and wary of U.S. alliances in the Asia-Pacific because they are perceived to be directed against China.<sup>16</sup>

### Overseas Basing

One manifestation of an alliance can be the military bases of one country on the territory of another. In this chapter, we treat overseas bases as an analytically distinct option separate from an alliance (but, of course, they may go together). Beijing’s new base in Djibouti is a case in point—despite China’s military installation, there is no expanded military cooperation between the two countries. Indeed, Djibouti plays host to the military bases of multiple

foreign states, including the United States, France, Italy, and Japan, but none of these countries could be characterized as an ally of Djibouti.

China's approach to overseas bases has undergone the clearest and most dramatic shift in terms of how China thinks about protecting its overseas interests. China has long adhered to its policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of others, which would ostensibly preclude military bases in foreign countries. Yet China's deployment in the Gulf of Aden since 2008 has triggered discussion among the Chinese public and elites of the need for bases to support forward-deployed forces, and in 2017, the Chinese government finally announced it would establish a military base in Djibouti (discussed below).

China's growing economic interests and the increased presence of PRC citizens abroad have largely driven public expectations for the Chinese government to protect these interests and related support for overseas bases to accomplish this mission. According to an in-depth report on Chinese overseas basing requirements, "polling data suggest the Chinese public has a positive attitude toward overseas bases."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the majority of respondents to polls as early as 2009 supported the construction of an overseas base, and bases were the most popular responses to a separate survey that same year asking how best to improve the PLA Navy (PLAN).<sup>18</sup>

Linked closely with public interest in overseas basing was elite advocacy for the Chinese government to establish such bases. A wide range of Chinese scholars and military commentators began discussing and recommending this course of action, especially after 2008. However, in January 2010, PLAN media commentator Zhang Zhaozhong instead stated that the odds were low that China would build an overseas base.<sup>19</sup> Academics also joined in the debate, with professor Shen Dingli in January 2010 explaining the four responsibilities such a base would accomplish: protecting "people and fortunes overseas . . . [and] trading," as well as preventing "overseas intervention which harms the unity of the country; and the defense against foreign invasion."<sup>20</sup> Discussions have waxed and waned in the years since, but general enthusiasm has persisted.



Chinese military officials have occasionally tactically supported the idea of overseas bases, or at least logistics facilities, to support operations far from Chinese shores. The PLA has studied U.S. operations in World War II and British operations in the early 1980s for the Falkland Islands to understand the requirements of distant sea logistics, suggesting at least an interest in such strategies.<sup>21</sup> After reports suggested China may be interested in establishing a base in the Seychelles in 2011, the Ministry of National Defense stated, “Based on our demand in the escort mission, China will consider stopping over at ports of Seychelles or other countries for supply.”<sup>22</sup>

With Djibouti establishing precedent for Chinese overseas bases, this raises the question of whether more will be built, and where they might be. Pakistan is a likely future choice. Civilian strategist Yan Xuetong advocates that China should consider military bases in countries that it considers allies and notes that “China now has only one real ally, Pakistan.” Nevertheless, he argued in February 2016 that it is “too early to say where China would build military bases.”<sup>23</sup> Pakistan’s close security cooperation with China generates intense speculation that it may play host to a Chinese base in the future. It has been suggested in 2014—before serious rumors began about the Djibouti base—that “Pakistan’s status as a trusted strategic partner whose interests are closely aligned with China’s make the country the most likely location for an overseas Chinese military base.”<sup>24</sup> Following the official announcement for Djibouti, the 2016 Department of Defense annual report to Congress suggested that Pakistan may host a future Chinese base.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the exact location of the proposed base is unclear. While Gwadar is mentioned most often, other sites, including Karachi and Jiwani, have been discussed.<sup>26</sup>

### Extended Power Projection

Another way to provide greater security for China’s overseas interests is to enhance and expand PLA power projection capabilities to be able to respond quickly to specific threats. Of course, this could be done in conjunction with other options, not merely as a standalone option. An

important element of expanding power projection would be developing expeditionary capabilities, which would likely emphasize maritime and aviation components.<sup>27</sup>

China's military modernization over the last 20 years has begun to lay the foundation for a blue water navy, but China does not yet have the capability to project power beyond East Asia. The PLAN has deployed its submarines outside Asia with more frequency in recent years and has recently deployed new longer range nuclear submarines, but its submarine force remains insufficient to protect the sea lines of communications along the OBOR route. China's growing fleet of aircraft carriers represents a much more visible "flag" for deployment abroad, but so far Beijing has kept the *Liaoning* in Asia, and it will likely take years if not decades for Beijing to develop carrier strike groups capable of conducting U.S.-style offensive operations around the world. Lastly, reporting suggests the PLAN will expand its marine corps to 100,000 servicemembers (partly by transferring PLA amphibious brigades).<sup>28</sup> This suggests following the U.S. model in order to have the option of deploying a land-based presence to combat terrorism or local instability along the OBOR. Further investment in submarines and more distant deployments of future aircraft carriers may suggest some Chinese interest in actively replacing the U.S. Navy's long-standing role as the ensurer of freedom of navigation, but China does not appear to have made this decision yet.

While China's Navy has led the way in developing power projection capabilities, the PLA Air Force is now beginning to demonstrate its power projection capabilities within the region. China's indigenously produced Y-20 provides a more capable strategic airlift capacity that may enable Beijing to deploy troops—such as its future marine force—quickly in a crisis along OBOR. The September 2016 announcement of the future H-20 next-generation strategic bomber will also extend the air force's reach further from the Chinese homeland, but this would likely have to be paired with an expansion of overseas military basing to support high-intensity operations abroad. One potential solution to this basing requirement would

be to make its bomber refuelable, which is reportedly under development.<sup>29</sup> Other future aerial power projection capabilities that may enable Beijing to avoid overseas basing would be to pursue unmanned combat aerial vehicles, such as the *Lijian*.<sup>30</sup> The air force's development of long-range capabilities may alleviate the direct requirement for bases abroad if Chinese aircraft can target hotspots along OBOR with aerial refueling, but the U.S. model clearly shows force projection on a global scale works best with bases abroad.

China has begun to use these more capable military assets in contingencies abroad. The PLA has participated in the United Nations–mandated Gulf of Aden antipiracy mission since 2008, already establishing a limited Chinese presence along the OBOR route years ahead of time. This was followed by noncombat evacuation operations (NEOs) from Libya in 2011 using PLA Air Force cargo planes and Yemen in 2015 using PLAN ships (for details see below).<sup>31</sup> Greater Chinese investment and workers in countries along the OBOR route mean that it is likely the PLA will remain in the business of conducting NEOs.

While China has a growing suite of military hardware that can power project abroad to secure its interests, China's ability to use these platforms has so far been constrained by a lack of dedicated facilities. One study suggested six potential logistics models that China could adopt for its overseas operations: “the pit stop model, lean colonial model, dual use logistics facility, string of pearls model, warehouse model, and model USA.”<sup>32</sup> After discounting the lean colonial, warehouse, and U.S. models because they violate China's non-interference policy and too closely mirror often criticized “hegemonic power,” the study suggests the dual use logistics facility and string of pearls models. However, “China appears to be planning for a relatively modest set of missions to support its overseas interests,” and the study rejects the possibility that China is pursuing the ability to conduct major combat operations abroad via a string of pearls strategy. Such operations would require hospitals; ordnance resupply; petroleum, oil, and lubricant stocks; and likely “bases to provide air cover for naval forces and to defend bases and logistics facilities from attack.” These are not evident

at any China-related facilities abroad.<sup>33</sup> Looking to the future, the study concludes that “the most efficient means of supporting more robust [PLA] out of area military operations would be a limited network of facilities that distribute functional responsibility geographically” and that such bases would be dual-use and “probably would be characterized by a light footprint with 100 to 500 military personnel conducting supply and logistics functions.” Indeed, the Djibouti base is intended to solve many of these challenges and is discussed in the following case study section. Finally, the PLA acknowledges its overseas operations are constrained by many factors, including legal ones.<sup>34</sup>

### **Outsourcing**

Another option is to rely on the host country and/or private contractors to handle security arrangements for China’s burgeoning overseas interests. The former is what happened in Pakistan. After the 2007 Red Mosque incident in which PRC citizens were murdered and others were taken hostage, Islamabad, under pressure from Beijing, reportedly established a security force exclusively charged with protecting Chinese citizens in Pakistan.<sup>35</sup> In other countries, PRC state-owned enterprises have relied on their own security guards or hired private security contractors—the Chinese equivalent of Blackwater—composed of retired PLA personnel.<sup>36</sup>

But no matter which one of these options—or combination of options—Beijing decides to pursue to provide security for China’s expanding overseas interests, it seems inevitable that the PLA will be expected to play a greater role. The potential set of PLA missions for specific PRC overseas interests is outlined in the table.

<b>Table. Overseas Interests and Potential PLA Missions</b>	
<b>Expanded Chinese Interest</b>	<b>Potential Corresponding PLA Missions</b>
<b>Protection of Chinese citizens living abroad</b>	Noncombatant evacuation operations, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, training and building partner capacity, special operations ashore, riverine operations, military criminal investigation functions, military diplomacy
<b>Protection of Chinese property/assets</b>	Counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, training and building partner capacity, special operations ashore, military criminal investigation, physical security/force protection, riverine operations, military diplomacy, presence operations
<b>Protection of Chinese shipping against pirates and other nontraditional threats</b>	Counterpiracy, escort shipping, maritime intercept operations; training and building partner capacity; sector patrolling; special operations ashore; visit, board, search, and seizure; replenishment at sea; seaborne logistics; military diplomacy
<b>Protection of sea lines of communication against adversary states</b>	Antisubmarine warfare, anti-air warfare, antisurface warfare, carrier operations, escort shipping, maritime intercept operations, air operations off ships, helicopter operations, vertical replenishment, replenishment at sea, seaborne logistics operations, military diplomacy, mine countermeasures

Source: Christopher D. Yung and Ross Rustici, *“Not an Idea We Have to Shun”: Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21st Century*, with Scott Devary and Jenny Lin, *China Strategic Perspectives 7* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2014), 9.

## **PLA Thinking about OBOR**

OBOR’s focus on economics and diplomacy has generated limited attention on the security dimension, and the PLA’s voice on this issue has tended to be rather muted. Nevertheless, there is a discernable discourse on the subject.

### **Discourse**

Previous research on PLA views of OBOR have been sporadic and mainly focused on military commentators in high-profile but mainstream publications, which are less authoritative than official PLA ones.<sup>37</sup> Earlier work by these authors found that most PLA discussions of OBOR focused on the benefits accruing to China from economic cooperation, especially against the backdrop of U.S.-China competition for influence in Asia, but did not

focus on PLA responsibilities to protect these trade routes or overseas assets. A survey of PLA writings on the topic through 2015 by Andrea Ghiselli argued that while all “support the idea that the PLA should protect Chinese interests along the One Belt and One Road, they disagree about whether the PLA is capable of doing so” and that this debate within the PLA about its role in the initiative outside Asia was likely more representative of PLA opinion rather than pure propaganda work.<sup>38</sup>

Some PLA experts placed greater emphasis on military involvement in the Silk Road Economic Belt or Maritime Silk Road—usually based on their service affiliation, with the navy favoring the Maritime Silk Road and the Army and Air Force favoring the Silk Road Economic Belt. Retired PLA Army analyst Major General Zhu Chenghu cautioned that while overseas bases were necessary, negative global opinion and domestic elections in host nations challenge the feasibility of the idea, and retired PLA Air Force Major General Qiao Liang suggested a solution to this problem through focusing on air force power projection in times of crisis instead of permanent naval deployments. Lyle Goldstein analyzes two articles by PLA authors and finds, “while it still seems quite far-fetched to argue that military strategy is a major impulse for the [Maritime Silk Road], there is a clear strain of threat perception,” possibly as opportunistic bandwagoning to justify a larger PLA role in Chinese foreign policy.<sup>39</sup> Most PLA writings cited focus on nontraditional threats and do not envision fighting a conventional adversary, mirroring Western academic consensus about likely PLA operations abroad.<sup>40</sup>

### Limited PLA Analysis of OBOR

A broad review of PLA sources suggests the Chinese military has yet to engage in a substantive debate over its roles and missions for OBOR. Indeed, as Goldstein stated, “such writings are rather rare. . . . Chinese military publications have been much more reticent to comment, preferring to stay with safe and relatively straightforward strategic issues, such as the maritime disputes.”<sup>41</sup> This is likely the reason most Western analysis of PLA views of

the initiative has focused on PLA “talking heads,” since they are the only ones providing even superficial analysis from the military. This lack of discussion could be due to a lack of senior-level consensus on the PLA’s role, sensitivity to imbuing a military angle to President Xi’s premier economic and diplomatic initiative, or because the military deems discussion about operations abroad as classified.<sup>42</sup>

A review of all Chinese military region newspapers, service newspapers, and military academic journals revealed few references to OBOR. OBOR has never been referenced in *China Military Science*, the PLA’s most authoritative journal, or in many of the operational and equipment journals that typically feature debates over the future of PLA capabilities and missions. These include *Ordnance Knowledge* [兵器知识], *Winged Missiles* [飞航导弹], and *Missiles and Space Vehicles* [导弹与航天运载技术]. The authors could find only two references to OBOR in the PLA Air Force’s *Kongjun Bao*, one in the PLA Navy’s *Renmin Haijun*, and none in the PLA Rocket Force’s *Huojian Bao*.<sup>43</sup>

There is some evidence that PLA entities studied OBOR in the summer of 2015. That June, PLA Air Force Commander Ma Xiaotian and other senior leaders held a conference with the Academy of Military Science titled the National Aerospace Security and Development Forum.<sup>44</sup> According to *Kongjun Bao*, “the forum was aimed at implementing Chairman Xi’s important instruction, serving the national strategy of ‘One Belt, One Road,’ strengthening the research of the informationized warfare winning mechanism, [and] providing theory support for winning local wars under informationized conditions.” While this may seem like empty rhetoric, the forum focused on the PLA Air Force’s responsibilities in the maritime domain, which is the most likely area for the service’s foreign operations along OBOR. It concluded “that the nation ‘will thrive if being oriented to the sea, and will decline if giving up the sea.’ . . . The maritime direction has become an important strategic direction concerning the nation’s economic lifeline and the expansion of its development interests, and [it] holds a more prominent status in the safeguarding of the national sovereignty, security,

and development interests.” In explaining the PLA Air Force’s role, the forum argued that “aerospace has become closely tied to the seas to an unprecedented extent” and that “no battlefield will be isolated.”

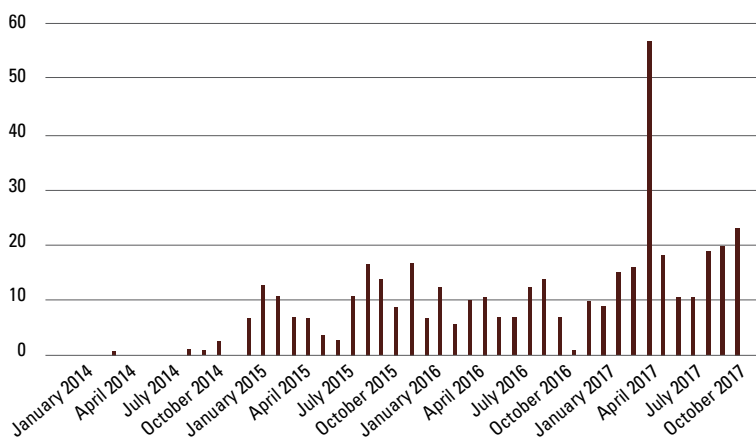
### PLA Pays Lip Service to OBOR

The PLA does, however, appear to pay lip service to the concept, likely as a way to demonstrate political loyalty to President Xi by supporting his key initiative and perhaps lobby for additional funding and resources. *PLA Daily* references to OBOR jumped dramatically during May 2017, when the first OBOR Forum was held in Beijing. This rhetorical support is common in the PLA’s military diplomacy, where OBOR is a common item discussed with foreign interlocutors.

### PLA Uses OBOR Opportunity to Reduce Threat Perceptions Abroad

The PLA commonly uses OBOR, and especially the historical Silk Road, as evidence that China’s current global outreach and presence is simply a continuation of China’s longstanding involvement in global affairs and that this involvement has always been peaceful. On the PLA Navy’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009, Commander Wu Shengli stated:<sup>45</sup>

**Figure. *PLA Daily* References to One Belt and One Road Initiative, 2014–2017**



Source: China National Knowledge Infrastructure (data through November 2017).



The maritime silk road starting from China's coastal areas became a friendship bond for spreading China's advanced civilization to the other parts of the world. More than 600 years ago, Zheng He, the famous Chinese navigator of the Ming Dynasty, led the then world's strongest fleets to sail the western seas seven times, reaching as far as the Red Sea and the eastern coast of Africa, and visiting more than 30 countries and regions. They did not sign any unequal treaties, did not claim any territory, and did not bring back even one slave. They wiped out pirates for the countries along their course, broad[ly] disseminated benevolence to friendly nations, brought China's tea, silk, cloth, chinaware, and Oriental civilization to the countries they visited, brought back other people's trust and friendship toward the Chinese nation, and created a world-level example of peaceful and friendly maritime exchanges.

#### Mini-Case Studies in Protecting China's Overseas Interests

This section examines three examples of PRC efforts to protect overseas interests. These cases have been selected to illustrate the full range of measures Beijing is employing. The first examines the establishment of China's first military base beyond its borders; the second examines the first overseas evacuation of civilians wholly planned and executed by the PLA; and the third examines host-nation efforts to provide enhanced protection for PRC citizens.

*Establishing a Base in Djibouti (2017).* There have long been rumors about the possibility of China establishing an overseas base, and this speculation has only increased as the PLA has become more involved in United Nations peacekeeping operations (since the 1990s) and anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden (since December 2008). The matter was sensitive in China, and PRC officials routinely denied that Beijing was considering establishing any base overseas. Thus, when questioned in 2011 as to whether the PRC was going to open a base in the Seychelles, a Ministry of Foreign

Affairs spokesman emphatically denied it, stating, “China has never set up military bases in other countries.”<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Beijing repeatedly denied that China was going to locate an installation in Djibouti. Even after the Djibouti president publicly announced in May 2016 that the two countries were discussing the prospect, the PRC Ministry of National Defense continued to deny the reports.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, Chinese civilian and military analysts had for years openly discussed the possibility and logic of such an unprecedented move. According to Senior Colonel Dai Xu, the criteria for locating “overseas bases,” included not only “the needs of escorting [commercial vessels] and peacekeeping . . . [but] also . . . the long-term protection of [China’s] overseas interests.”<sup>48</sup> Djibouti was a logical choice for several reasons. First, it is almost certainly the least controversial location. As noted above, other states already have military installations there, and Beijing knew it would be hard for critics inside or outside of China to accuse the PRC of creating a new alliance, or strengthening an existing alliance, and/or threatening third countries. If China had established its first overseas military base in Pakistan, the move would have likely provoked tremendous controversy, especially from India.<sup>49</sup>

Second, the location makes great sense considering PLA recent activities in the Middle East and North Africa and China’s growing interests in the region. China officially has described the facility as a “logistics facility,” which will provide valuable support for ongoing PLAN anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and potentially for Chinese forces involved in multiple United Nations peacekeeping operations in the region, including South Sudan and Lebanon. Furthermore, Chinese overseas interests in the area are significant and only likely to grow since the Middle East constitutes the nexus of the overland “belt” and maritime “road” of the PRC OBOR initiative. Not only does China have substantial economic investments in countries of the region, but there are also approximately 500,000 PRC citizens living and working in the Middle East and as many as 1 million citizens on the African continent.<sup>50</sup>

China's base in Djibouti positions it to extend military power and strategic influence over a critical part of OBOR, and the base appears to be designed with room to grow as Chinese interests expand in the coming years. Although rumors of China's troop strength initially went as high as 10,000, it appears China began with stationing several hundred troops there, including some marines.<sup>51</sup> This makes it comparable to most other foreign bases, though the United States has 4,000 troops.<sup>52</sup> The 90-acre base is reportedly capable of supporting a brigade, with a heliport (including a 400-meter runway), ammunition, as well as petroleum, oil, and lubricant storage.<sup>53</sup> The base has already conducted several live-fire exercises since it opened in August 2017, and according to one analysis, it "will be able to accommodate all but the two largest ships in China's fleet."<sup>54</sup>

*Evacuating Citizens from Yemen (2015)*. Beijing is increasingly concerned about the safety of its citizens in hot spots around the world, and for more than two decades the PRC has been engaged in efforts to extract civilians from harm's way. Despite modest capabilities, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has effectively conducted more than two dozen evacuations from countries around the globe. All but two of these operations have been purely civilian with no discernible involvement of PLA personnel or assets. The first exception was in 2011, when Beijing organized the extraction of approximately 36,000 PRC citizens from the chaos of post-Muammar Qadhafi Libya, mostly using civilian and commercial vessels with some support from one PLA naval vessel in the Mediterranean. Some civilians were flown out on chartered commercial airliners, but several hundred were evacuated on PLA Air Force transports via Sudan.<sup>55</sup>

The second and most noteworthy participation by the PLA in an overseas evacuation operation was the 2015 NEO from Yemen. The operation, while coordinated with the other PRC bureaucratic actors, notably the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, marked the first time that the PLA took the central role in planning and executing an evacuation of Chinese citizens from a crisis zone far from home. In response to Saudi Arabia's decision to attack Houthi rebels in Yemen, China evacuated more than 600 Chinese

citizens and nearly 300 foreign citizens over a week from multiple ports in Yemen using three PLAN ships.<sup>56</sup> Some of these people were initially transported to Djibouti before flying home to China, underscoring the strategic location of China's first overseas military base.<sup>57</sup>

The operation clearly showed the benefits of China's military deployments abroad. Most importantly, the evacuation began quickly because the PLAN ships involved were drawn from Gulf of Aden patrols, reaching port to start evacuations in 3 days.<sup>58</sup> By comparison, a naval deployment from the Chinese mainland would likely have taken upward of 2 weeks. Second, the security situation was likely too dangerous for private companies to transport the evacuees, showing the limits of relying primarily on commercial assets as in the Libya NEO.<sup>59</sup> Third, evacuating foreign citizens allowed China, and especially the PLA, to frame Chinese foreign deployments as beneficial to others. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the NEO was a "special action by the Chinese government to evacuate foreign nationals," which embodied the notions of 'putting the people first.'<sup>60</sup> This narrative was also touted at home as a reflection of President Xi's "strong army dream."<sup>61</sup>

*Outsourcing Security of PRC Citizens in Pakistan (Since 2007).* Since the 1990s when Chinese citizens have been more active traveling and living overseas, they have been subject to crimes and acts of violence. Of course, PRC citizens can be victimized by criminals or terrorists in any country, but they are more vulnerable in some countries and regions than others. Chinese nationals have been killed and/or kidnapped in tumultuous and unstable countries in Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

While the thousands of Chinese living and working in Pakistan had been occasionally victimized by criminals and extremists, until the mid-2000s, they had not been targeted by militants to the same extent Westerners had. The turning point was the Red Mosque incident in mid-2007 after seven Chinese massage parlor workers were kidnapped by Islamic extremists in Islamabad.<sup>62</sup> The PRC citizens were eventually released unharmed, but the episode culminated in the siege and storming of the Red Mosque complex in July 2007. Pakistani commandos stormed the fortified mosque defended

by armed Islamic extremists on July 10, and 20 hours later the complex was secured at the cost of more than 100 fatalities. The battle was the most intense and sustained combat that Pakistan's capital city had ever witnessed.<sup>63</sup>

The June kidnapping of the seven Chinese workers prompted a proactive response by PRC officials starting with PRC ambassador to Pakistan, Luo Zhaohui. Luo reached out to numerous Pakistani political figures, including the sitting prime minister, former officials, and even the leader of the militants holding the Chinese hostages. PRC Minister of Public Security Zhou Yongkang also spoke with his Pakistani counterpart, and PLA leaders communicated with Pakistani military leaders. In addition, President Hu Jintao telephoned Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf on the matter.<sup>64</sup>

Although the Chinese workers were released unharmed, Chinese citizens in Pakistan became targets after the bloody end to the Red Mosque incident, as many Islamic radicals blamed China for the crackdown. In response, PRC leaders demanded that the Pakistan government do much more to protect Chinese citizens. Islamabad established a National Crisis Management Cell to coordinate the protection of PRC citizens working in Pakistan.<sup>65</sup> The cell also formed a joint liaison committee that included PRC diplomats. Furthermore, a 24-hour hotline was created linking China's embassy in Islamabad with Pakistan's interior ministry and provincial authorities across the country. In addition, "thousands" of additional security personnel were added to secure Chinese construction projects, and Chinese workers were transported in armed convoys.

According to one account, by December 2008, Pakistan mobilized nine thousand soldiers and police to guard PRC citizens. Moreover, the PRC reportedly contributed almost \$300 million worth of new security equipment for Pakistani police.<sup>66</sup> The increased efforts appear to have improved the security of PRC citizens in-country. Beijing was sufficiently satisfied. The improved security situation allowed Xi to make a visit to Pakistan in April 2015 and to declare that Beijing was committing \$46 billion worth of infrastructure investments to develop an ambitious China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.<sup>67</sup>

## **Conclusions**

As China's national interests have expanded further beyond the shores of the PRC, Beijing has gradually embraced the idea that China is responsible for protecting these interests and that the PLA ought to play a key role in safeguarding these interests against both traditional and nontraditional security threats.

The PLA constitutes only one set of tools—albeit an important set—in the larger PRC toolkit available to protect China's interests abroad. But no matter which of the five security options discussed above Beijing adopts to protect its burgeoning overseas interests, the PLA will be expected and will be ordered to play a greater role. While China's armed forces will salute and do their best to obey, the PRC's flag continues to lag in terms of available capabilities and resources especially for out-of-area security requirements.

Of the five discrete alternatives identified in this chapter, free riding and outsourcing seem destined to continue for the foreseeable future. Both are appealing options in the absence of robust enhanced PLA capabilities. Indeed, the PLA's power projection capabilities are likely to grow only incrementally and remain extremely limited, especially for out-of-area deployments and employments in the near to medium term. Meanwhile, barring a dramatic worsening of the strategic environment, China is unlikely to go much beyond "rethinking" alliances. The most likely developments in coming years are the establishment of at least one or two more military bases overseas, with Pakistan being perhaps the most plausible location. With the construction of a logistics facility in Djibouti, China has effectively broken the taboo of building military installations beyond the borders of the PRC.

Although OBOR is officially a new foreign policy initiative under President Xi, the overseas interests at stake for the PLA to protect have slowly been growing in these places since the 1990s. The PLA has already used some of its newer military capabilities in contingencies along the route—mainly evacuating Chinese citizens from warzones, such as Libya in 2011 and Yemen in 2015. As greater numbers of more advanced platforms come online—including aircraft carriers, submarines, strategic airlift and

long-distance bombers—an important question is how hard the PLA will be pressed to employ these capabilities far from China's shores.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Trade No Longer Follows the Flag, Prime Minister,” *Financial Times*, November 13, 2015, available at <[www.ft.com/content/cd0d47b8-8a04-11e5-9f8c-a8d619fa707c](http://www.ft.com/content/cd0d47b8-8a04-11e5-9f8c-a8d619fa707c)>.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase *Great Leap Outward* was coined by one of the authors. See Andrew Scobell, “Introduction,” in *China's Great Leap Outward: The Hard and Soft Dimensions of a Rising Power*, ed. Andrew Scobell and Marylena Mantas (New York: Academy of Political Science, 2014), 5–6.

<sup>3</sup> For good overviews of One Belt, One Road (OBOR), see Nadege Rolland, *China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative* (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, May 2017); and Joel Wuthnow, *Chinese Perspectives on the Belt and Road Initiative: Strategic Rationales, Risks, and Implications*, China Strategic Perspectives 12 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Hartnett, “The ‘New Historic Missions’: Reflections on Hu Jintao’s Military Legacy,” in *Assessing the People’s Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, ed. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Travis Tanner (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, April 2014), 31–80; Daniel Hartnett, *Towards a Globally Focused Chinese Military: The Historic Missions of the Chinese Armed Forces* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2008); David M. Finkelstein, “China’s National Military Strategy,” in *The People’s Liberation Army in the Information Age*, ed. James C. Mulvenon and Richard H. Yang (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), 99–145.

<sup>5</sup> Jonas Parello-Plesner and Mathieu Duchâtel, *China’s Strong Arm: Protecting Citizens and Assets Abroad* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015), 69.

<sup>6</sup> Chinese government officials, media, and experts castigate U.S. alliances as the cause of much of the tensions in Asia. See, for example, Timothy R. Heath, “China and the U.S. Alliance System,” *The Diplomat*, available at <<http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/china-and-the-u-s-alliance-system/>>; and Adam P. Liff, “China and the U.S. Alliance System,” *China Quarterly*, no. 233 (March 2018), 137–165.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 1, 1n and 12n.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Scobell and Mark Cozad, “China’s North Korea Policy: Rethink or Recharge?” *Parameters* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 51–63.

<sup>9</sup> Huang Yufan, “Yan Xuetong Urges China to Adopt a More Assertive Foreign Policy,” *New York Times*, February 9, 2016, available at <[www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/world/asia/china-foreign-policy-yan-xuetong.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/world/asia/china-foreign-policy-yan-xuetong.html)>.

<sup>10</sup> On the China-Pakistan relationship, see Andrew Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). On China's security relations with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, see Andrew Scobell, Ely Ratner, and Michael Beckley, *China's Strategy Toward South and Central Asia: An Empty Fortress* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945–1963* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998); Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Chen Dingding, “Are China and Russia Moving Toward a Formal Alliance?” *The Diplomat*, May 30, 2014, available at <<http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/are-china-and-russia-moving-toward-a-formal-alliance/>>.

<sup>13</sup> Zheng Yu, “China and Russia: Alliance or No Alliance?,” *China-U.S. Focus*, July 29, 2016, available at <[www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/china-and-russia-alliance-or-no-alliance](http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/china-and-russia-alliance-or-no-alliance)>.

<sup>14</sup> Xi Jinping [习近平], “New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation” [积极树立亚洲安全观共创安全合作新局面], speech delivered to the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, Shanghai, May 21, 2014, available at <[www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1159951.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml)>.

<sup>15</sup> “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on September 14, 2017,” Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 14, 2017, available at <[www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1493166.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1493166.shtml)>. See also the white paper *China's Policies of Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation* (Beijing: State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, January 2017), available at <[www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1429771.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1429771.shtml)>.

<sup>16</sup> Heath, “China and the U.S. Alliance System.”

<sup>17</sup> Christopher D. Yung and Ross Rustici, “*Not an Idea We Have to Shun*”: *Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, China Strategic Perspectives 7, with Scott Devary and Jenny Lin (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2014), 53.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; Gao Youbin [高友斌], “Netizens Call for Overseas Base, Aircraft Carrier Formation to Maintain Distant Sea Rights and Interests” [网民呼吁寻求



海外基地组航母编队维护远洋利益], *Global Times* [环球时报], October 21, 2009, available at <<http://mil.huanqiu.com/china/2009-10/608793.html>>.

<sup>19</sup> “Zhang Zhaozhong: Probability That China Builds Overseas Base Not Large” [张召忠: 中国在海外建军事基地的可能性不大], *QQ.com*, January 19, 2010, available at <<http://news.qq.com/a/20100119/002913.htm>>.

<sup>20</sup> Yung and Rustici, “*Not an Idea We Have to Shun*,” 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 10; Christopher D. Yung, “Sinica Rules the Waves? The People’s Liberation Army Navy’s Power Projection and Anti-Access/Area Denial Lessons from the Falklands/Malvinas Conflict,” in *Chinese Lessons from Other People’s Wars*, ed. Andrew Scobell, David Lai, and Roy Kamphausen (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Li Zhenyu, “China Denies Overseas Military Base Rumors,” *People’s Daily Online*, December 14, 2011, available at <<http://en.people.cn/90786/7676578.html>>.

<sup>23</sup> Yufan, “Yan Xuetong Urges China to Adopt a More Assertive Foreign Policy.”

<sup>24</sup> Yung and Rustici, “*Not an Idea We Have to Shun*,” 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2017* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017), 5.

<sup>26</sup> Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, “A New China Military Base in Pakistan?” *The Diplomat*, February 9, 2018, available at <<https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/a-new-china-military-base-in-pakistan/>>.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Cristina L. Garafola and Timothy R. Heath, *The Chinese Air Force’s First Steps Toward Becoming an Expeditionary Air Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Minnie Chan, “As Overseas Ambitions Expand, China Plans 400 Per Cent Increase to Marine Corps Numbers, Sources Say,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), March 13, 2017, available at <[www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2078245/overseas-ambitions-expand-china-plans-400pc-increase](http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2078245/overseas-ambitions-expand-china-plans-400pc-increase)>.

<sup>29</sup> “Expert: If the Airborne Refuelable-6K Is True, Its Range Will Exceed 10,000 Kilometers” [专家: 空中受油型轰-6K若属实 其航程将超1万公里], *People’s Daily Online*, August 18, 2017, available at <<http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0818/c1011-29479619.html>>.

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey Lin and P.W. Singer, “Meet China’s Sharp Sword, a Stealth Drone That Can Likely Carry 2 Tons of Bombs,” *Popular Science*, January 18, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> On People’s Liberation Army (PLA) involvement in these operations, see Degang Sun, “China’s Military Relations with the Middle East,” in *The Red Star*

and the Crescent: China and the Middle East, ed. James Reardon-Anderson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 99–100.

<sup>32</sup> Yung and Rustici, “Not an Idea We Have to Shun,” 1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>34</sup> An Puzhong [安普忠], “Accelerating the Legislation of Overseas Non-War Military Operations” [加快海外非战争军事行动立法], *PLA Daily*, March 10, 2015, available at <[www.81.cn/2015qqlh/2015-03/10/content\\_6388233.htm](http://www.81.cn/2015qqlh/2015-03/10/content_6388233.htm)>.

<sup>35</sup> Parello-Plesner and Duchâtel, *China’s Strong Arm*, 79–81.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Clover, “Chinese Private Security Companies Go Global,” *Financial Times*, February 26, 2017, available at <[www.ft.com/content/2a1ce1c8-fa7c-11e6-9516-2d969e0d3b65](http://www.ft.com/content/2a1ce1c8-fa7c-11e6-9516-2d969e0d3b65)>; and Zi Yang, “China’s Private Security Companies: Domestic and International Roles,” *China Brief* 16, no. 15 (October 4, 2016), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-private-security-companies-domestic-international-roles/>>.

<sup>37</sup> Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, “Dispatch from Beijing: PLA Writings on the New Silk Road,” *China Brief* 15, no. 4 (February 20, 2015), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/dispatch-from-beijing-pla-writings-on-the-new-silk-road/>>; Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, “Rolling Out the New Silk Road: Railroads Undergird Beijing’s Strategy,” *China Brief* 15, no. 8 (April 16, 2015), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/rolling-out-the-new-silk-road-railroads-undergird-beijings-strategy/>>; Andrea Ghiselli, “The Belt, the Road and the PLA,” *China Brief* 15, no. 20 (October 19, 2015), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/the-belt-the-road-and-the-pla/>>. See also, Wuthnow, *Chinese Perspectives on the Belt and Road Initiative*.

<sup>38</sup> PLA commentators are first and foremost propaganda outlets. See Andrew Chubb, “Propaganda, Not Policy: Explaining the PLA’s ‘Hawkish Faction’ (Part One),” *China Brief* 13, no. 15 (July 25, 2013), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/propaganda-not-policy-explaining-the-plas-hawkish-faction-part-one/>>.

<sup>39</sup> Lyle Goldstein, “China’s ‘One Belt One Road’ Is a Big Deal. So What Is the Role for Beijing’s Military?” *National Interest*, November 20, 2016, available at <<http://nationalinterest.org/print/feature/chinas-one-belt-one-road-big-deal-so-what-the-role-beijings-18456>>.

<sup>40</sup> Parello-Plesner and Duchâtel, *China’s Strong Arm*; and Oriana Skylar Mastro, “China’s Military Is about to Go Global,” *National Interest*, December 18, 2014, available at <<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/chinas-military-about-go-global-11882>>.

<sup>41</sup> Goldstein, “China’s ‘One Belt One Road’ Is a Big Deal.”

<sup>42</sup> Almost all People's Republic of China (PRC) official speeches and writings stress the economic cooperation aspect of One Belt, One Road (OBOR) and downplay/deny any strategic ambitions. See Wuthnow, *Chinese Perspectives on the Belt and Road Initiative*.

<sup>43</sup> There was one reference to the historical silk road in *Renmin Haijun* from April 2009 and two from *Kongjun Bao* in January 2010 and October 2010. For articles that mention OBOR specifically, see Gong Benhai and Xu Yi [巩本海, 许毅], "Third 'National Aerospace Security and Development Forum' Is Held in Beijing" [第三届“国家空天安全与发展论坛”在京举行], *Kongjun Bao* [空军报], June 24, 2015, 1; Gao Jie [高杰], "Resolutely Maintain the Core, Speed Up the Strategic Transformation: Theory Study Central Group of the PLA Air Force Party Committee Holds a Concentrated Study Session on 'Promoting the In-Depth Implementation of Safeguarding the Core and Obeying Command, Speeding Up the Process of the Air Force's Strategic Transformation from the New Starting Point of Reform and Military Strengthening'" [坚定维护核心加速战略转型: 空军党委理论学习中心组开展“推动维护核心, 听从指挥落深落实, 在改革强军新起点上加速推进空军战略转型”专题集中学习综述], *Kongjun Bao* [空军报], June 26, 2017, 1; and Zhao Xin [赵新], "Vigorously Strengthen the 'Four Counters' Work to Build a Defense Line for Covert Struggle" [大力加强“四反”工作筑牢隐蔽斗争防线], *Renmin Haijun* [人民海军], July 3, 2017, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Gong and Xu, "Third 'National Aerospace Security and Development Forum' Is Held in Beijing," 1.

<sup>45</sup> Wu Shengli [吴胜利], "Make Concerted Efforts to Jointly Build Harmonious Ocean" [同心协力共建和谐海洋], *Renmin Haijun* [人民海军], April 22, 2009, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Li Zhenyu, "China Denies Overseas Military Base Rumors," *People's Daily Online*, December 14, 2011, available at <<http://en.people.cn/90786/7676578.html>>.

<sup>47</sup> Ben Blanchard, "China Military Declines to Confirm Djibouti Base Plan," Reuters, June 25, 2015, available at <[www.reuters.com/article/us-china-defence-djibouti/china-military-declines-to-confirm-djibouti-base-plan-idUSKBN0P51CV20150625](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-defence-djibouti/china-military-declines-to-confirm-djibouti-base-plan-idUSKBN0P51CV20150625)>; and Kristina Wong, "China's Military Makes Move into Africa," *The Hill*, November 24, 2015, available at <<https://thehill.com/policy/defense/261153-chinas-military-makes-move-into-africa>>.

<sup>48</sup> Retired Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo proposed the idea of a PLA base in Djibouti. See Yung and Rustici, "Not an Idea We Have to Shun," 11.

<sup>49</sup> Sarah Zheng, "China's Djibouti Military Base: 'Logistics Facility,' or Platform for Geopolitical Ambitions Overseas?" *South China Morning Post* (Hong

Kong), October 1, 2017, available at <[www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2113300/chinas-djibouti-military-base-logistics-facility-or](http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2113300/chinas-djibouti-military-base-logistics-facility-or)>.

<sup>50</sup> For estimates on the number of PRC citizens in the Middle East and Africa, see, respectively, Andrew Scobell and Alireza Nader, *China in the Middle East: The Wary Dragon* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), 18; and Howard W. French, *China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa* (New York: Random House, 2015).

<sup>51</sup> “China Formally Opens First Overseas Military Base in Djibouti,” Reuters, August 1, 2017, available at <[www.reuters.com/article/us-china-djibouti/china-formally-opens-first-overseas-military-base-in-djibouti-idUSKBN1AH3E3](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-djibouti/china-formally-opens-first-overseas-military-base-in-djibouti-idUSKBN1AH3E3)>.

<sup>52</sup> Of the eight countries with facilities there, most are small, and France and the United States have the largest troop levels, 2,000 and 4,000, respectively. See Erica Downs, Jeffrey Becker, and Patrick deGategno, *China's Military Support Facility in Djibouti: The Economic and Security Dimensions of China's First Overseas Base* (Arlington, VA: CNA, July 2017).

<sup>53</sup> Mike Yeo, “Satellite Imagery Offers Clues to China's Intentions in Djibouti,” *Defense News*, November 8, 2017, available at <[www.defensenews.com/global/mideast-africa/2017/11/08/satellite-imagery-offers-clues-to-chinas-intentions-in-djibouti/](http://www.defensenews.com/global/mideast-africa/2017/11/08/satellite-imagery-offers-clues-to-chinas-intentions-in-djibouti/)>.

<sup>54</sup> Kinling Lo, “Chinese Troops Head Back into the Djibouti Desert for Live-Fire Drills,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), November 25, 2017, available at <[www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2121547/chinese-troops-head-back-djibouti-desert-live-fire](http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2121547/chinese-troops-head-back-djibouti-desert-live-fire)>; Downs, Becker, and deGategno, *China's Military Support Facility in Djibouti*.

<sup>55</sup> Gabe Collins and Andrew Erickson, “Implications of China's Military Evacuation of Citizens from Libya,” *China Brief* 11, no. 4 (March 11, 2011), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/implications-of-chinas-military-evacuation-of-citizens-from-libya/>>.

<sup>56</sup> “Spotlight: China Completes Evacuation from Yemen, Assisting 629 Nationals, 279 Foreigners,” Xinhua, April 7, 2015, available at <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/07/c\\_134130679.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/07/c_134130679.htm)>.

<sup>57</sup> “Chinese Warship Carrying 83 Evacuees from Yemen Arrives in Djibouti,” Xinhua, April 7, 2015, available at <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/07/c\\_134129830.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-04/07/c_134129830.htm)>.

<sup>58</sup> Guo Yuandan and Yu Wen [郭媛丹, 于文], “Chinese Navy Has Temporarily Paused Patrols in the Gulf of Aden: Expert—May Be to Participate in

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<sup>59</sup> Zhang Yunbi, “Navy Wins Praise for Evacuating Foreigners,” *China Daily* (Beijing), April 7, 2015, available at <[www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-04/07/content\\_20012083.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-04/07/content_20012083.htm)>; and Xie Chuanjiao, “Cool under Fire, Captain Leads by Example,” *China Daily*, September 3, 2015, available at <[www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2015-09/03/content\\_21782031.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2015-09/03/content_21782031.htm)>.

<sup>60</sup> “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on April 3, 2015,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 3, 2015, available at <[www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1251976.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1251976.shtml)>.

<sup>61</sup> Fan Jianghuai, Zhou Meng, and Zhou Yuan [范江怀, 周猛, 周远], “To Raise the Strong Army Dream, the Rule of Law Is the Cornerstone” [托举强军梦, 法治基石坚如磐], *PLA Daily* (Beijing), October 28, 2016, available at <[www.81.cn/2016gtzghy/2016-10/28/content\\_7331168.htm](http://www.81.cn/2016gtzghy/2016-10/28/content_7331168.htm)>.

<sup>62</sup> Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis*, 111.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, ix–xvi.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, xii–xiv.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 111–112.

<sup>66</sup> Isaac B. Kardon, *China and Pakistan: Emerging Strains in the Entente Cordiale* (Arlington, VA: Project 2049 Institute, 2011), 14, 16.

<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, PRC security concerns persist, and in February 2016, Pakistan promised to create a “special force” of 10,000 troops to protect Chinese workers and investments. See Shannon Tiezzi, “Pakistan Will Provide ‘Special Force’ to Defend Chinese Investments,” *The Diplomat*, February 5, 2016, available at <<https://thediplomat.com/2016/02/pakistan-will-provide-special-force-to-defend-chinese-investments>>.