



REMOTE WARFARE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN DJIBOUTI

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM



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Executive summary

Djibouti, a small country in East Africa, is home to the military bases of some of the most powerful countries in the world, including the United States, China, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Italy. Russia, Spain, Germany, and the United Kingdom also have troops operating out of Djibouti. Most of these forces participate in antipiracy initiatives off the coast of Somalia. Some are also engaged in training and capacity building with East African military forces. The US military also runs special forces and drone strike operations out of its base, Camp Lemonnier—the only officially recognised US military base on the continent.

Heavily militarised by foreign powers, the Djiboutian government collects at least \$300 million of rent from the bases per year, while nearly two-thirds of the Djiboutian population lives in poverty and half the labour force is unemployed. The President, who was recently elected for a fourth-term in elections, is considered corrupt and repressive by human rights groups and by the US State Department—though this has not impacted the US government's bilateral relationship with Djibouti. Neither has the Djiboutian government's failure to effectively combat human trafficking and sexual violence. Djibouti received the lowest ranking in the 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report published by the State Department, yet suffered no consequences. In 2017, Djibouti was once again elevated to the "Tier 2 Watch List" on the basis that the government made "key achievements" to meet the "minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking," even though the report acknowledges it has not met these standards.

The combination of high numbers of foreign military personnel, flows of migrants, high numbers of refugees, and low unemployment and opportunities for work creates a powder keg for sexual violence and exploitation. The foreign military presence in Djibouti exacerbates the risks of trafficking and "prostitution". The military bases provide a steady market for women, girls, and boys who are forced into sex work due to poverty or trafficking.

This report seeks to provide some insight and analysis of the militarisation and human rights abuses in Djibouti, focusing in particular on the relationship between foreign military bases and sexual violence. It is not an exhaustive study. Most of the research focuses on the United States' role in Djibouti, because the US currently has the largest base with the most personnel; the US government provides the most transparent information about its contracts and agreements with Djibouti; and information about the US military's operations and conduct have been made available through Wikileaks and the Drone Papers.

The **introduction** offers an overview of the situation in Djibouti and provides background on the relationship between military bases and sexual violence. The chapter on **remote warfare in Djibouti** gives a short synopsis of each of the foreign militaries known to be operating in Djibouti, as well as information about contractors and private companies working at the US base. The **arms trade and trafficking** section provides a cursory glance at the weaponisation of Djibouti and its role in arms trafficking. **Human rights in Djibouti**

offers an examination of challenges related human trafficking, sexual violence, and discrimination against women, as well as repression of freedom of assembly, speech, and political dissent.

This report builds upon the work of two investigative journalists from the Netherlands, Sanne Terlingen and Hannah Kooy, who provided accounts of the situation in Djibouti for OneWorld and the Human Trafficking Center. The aim of this report is to give more exposure to the situation in Djibouti to help activists, journalists, lawyers, international and civil society organisations, and other governments to challenge the militarisation of the country and its relationship to trafficking and sexual violence.

Much more research is needed. We know little about the numbers of foreign personnel present in the country, particularly from contracting companies working on the bases. What we do know is largely limited to the US base; information about the other military forces and contractors is comparatively unknown.

Accountability and justice are imperative. We have seen time and again throughout the world that wherever foreign militaries set up shop, sexual violence becomes part of the local landscape. This is unacceptable and must be confronted by all those committed to protecting human rights and dignity. The establishment of foreign military bases has proven to be damaging to local people, local economies, and have “helped lock us inside a permanently militarized society that has made all of us—everyone on this planet—less secure.”¹ The

case of Djibouti is all too perfect example of this. It demands our attention and immediate action.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are meant to delineate an approach that should be adopted but further investigation is needed to develop an effective, integrated strategy to effectively confront the violations of human rights and the increasing militarisation of Djibouti and the region. These recommendations are based on WILPF’s and other women’s rights groups’ considerable experience addressing similar issues in countries where militarisation and attendant violations of rights have been exposed.

1. The demilitarisation of Djibouti is an imperative. Instead of establishing and maintaining military bases, the international community should ensure economic and other support to address the chronic human rights situation in the country.
2. In the meantime, all states carry with them extraterritorial obligations in relation to their militaries or other presence in a third country. States with military operations in Djibouti must use their influence with the Djiboutian government to ensure respect for human rights.
3. All states that have a military presence in Djibouti must:
 - Ensure training so that all troops are aware of the crimes related to having sex with a trafficked person and in all cases of sex with minors;

- Ensure real investigation and accountability mechanisms are in place; and
- Place all civilian contractors under the same regulations as military personnel through status of forces agreements.

4. In addition, international organisations and civil society groups must conduct more research into the laws and prosecutions involving other governments' military and contracting personnel, including investigations into the companies contracted by all of the military bases in Djibouti; the numbers and sex of workers employed by these companies; the conduct of military personnel and contractors employed at the military bases; and the restrictions placed upon them by their home governments and mechanisms to hold them to account for violations of these laws.

5. States operating militarily in Djibouti must desist from any activity that facilitates the commission of war crimes or violations of international humanitarian law or human rights law in Yemen.

6. All states, including states parties and signatories to the Arms Trade Treaty, must cease arms transfers to Djibouti, including equipment that can be used to facilitate gender-based violence, carry out surveillance against human rights defenders, and oppress human rights. States should undertake measures to prevent the illicit trafficking of weapons through Djibouti, including off its coast.

7. The peoples from states in the region will continue to flee unless and until the root causes of forced displacement are addressed, including armed conflict, poverty, and environmental degradation. States, through the multilateral system, should develop a strategic and integrated plan for the region based on the

realisation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as an alternative to militarised security policies.

8. At least until they have withdrawn, all countries with a military presence, and their contractors, should make substantial financial contributions, to designated international organisations, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), in order to:

- Improve rapid and effective registration of migrants and refugees crossing the border into Djibouti and provide adequate reception facilities that take into account the gendered dimensions of displacement;
- Provide information to migrants and refugees as to legal status, legal options, and advise as to the extent of trafficking and the risk of forced labour in Djibouti;
- Improve the conditions in the refugee camps in Djibouti and create a safe space for women and children, including by considering alternative places to Ali Addeh, which is already compromised;
- Vastly improve recruitment and training of staff for the refugee camp(s) and ensure accountability mechanisms for staff behaviour;
- Develop a detailed strategy for ensuring the camps are as safe as possible, that gender analysis is conducted and responded to, and that there is refugee participation in the way it is run;
- End the repatriation of migrant children deemed to have broken the law and provide services for them; and
- Decriminalise prostitution, which is enabling the state to persecute those forced into the sex industry with no legal or other protections.

Introduction

“Djibouti is a country of less than 900,000 people that would not register significantly in the global consciousness except for its strategic location in East Africa, at the mouth of the Red Sea and the rest of the Persian Gulf,” writes investigative journalist Tim Mak of *The Daily Beast*.² A small, hot, dry country with high levels of poverty, it has made its claim to fame by virtue of its location, attracting the militaries of some of the most powerful countries in the world. The United States, China, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Italy have or are constructing military bases in the country. Russia, Spain, Germany, and the United Kingdom also have troops operating out of Djibouti.

The attraction has in part to do with antipiracy efforts off the coast of Somalia. All ships passing through the Suez Canal to Europe or to the Indian Ocean need to sail through the Bab al-Mandab Strait. 20,000 ships and 20 per cent of global exports travel this route every year.³

Beyond that, however, Djibouti is critical for geostrategic military operations in the post-9/11 world. Djibouti sits between East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, allowing aircraft stationed there to reach Somalia or Yemen in minutes. Many of the foreign militaries operating in Djibouti participate in operations against al-Shabaab in Somalia or al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen—either directly through drone strikes or by training Djiboutian and other East African militaries.⁴ US special forces use their base in Djibouti for operations against Boko Haram, the Lord’s Resistance Army, and Daesh, and as a launching pad for drone strikes.⁵

“This is not an outpost in the middle of nowhere that is of marginal interest,” US officials have argued. “This is a very important location in terms of US interests, in terms of freedom of navigation, when it comes to power projection.”⁶ It has become an instrumental location in the US-led “global war on terror”.

A militarist rentier economy

In this context, the Djiboutian government has seized the opportunity to turn the country into a landlord of militarism. The foreign military bases pull in at least \$300 million annually in lease fees. The government recently turned away Russia, worried it would upset relations with the numerous western countries that are already tenants—though it did allow China to take up residency, perhaps because China was already financing several major infrastructure projects related to ports, airports, and railways, worth about \$9 billion.⁷

Meanwhile, nearly two-thirds of the Djiboutian population lives in poverty and half the labour force is unemployed.⁸ Djibouti’s GDP (purchasing power parity) in 2015 was estimated at \$3.094 billion, ranked 186 out of 230 countries.⁹ 23 per cent of the population lives below in the poverty line. The country has few natural resources or industry.¹⁰

Djibouti’s formal economy “is that of a classic rentier economy,” says a Chatham House report. “A small elite comprises a relatively well-educated and well-paid cadre of civil servants, plus a small business class that subsists largely from foreign trade. Formal-sector salaries

sustain a narrow, largely urban electorate, which coexists with the extremely poor remainder of the population.”¹¹

Militarism and human rights abuses, including sexual violence and exploitation

Within this context of high levels of militarism and poverty, respect for human rights is also a major issue in Djibouti. The President, who was recently elected for a fourth-term in elections considered corrupt by most human rights groups, actively suppresses freedom of speech and dissent.¹² The US State Department has critiqued the Djiboutian government for restricting free speech and assembly; using excessive force, including torture; and harassing and detaining government critiques.¹³ In addition, the country's family laws discriminate against women and in some cases facilitate gender-based violence, such as female genital mutilation.

The government has also continued to fail to effectively combat human trafficking and sexual violence.¹⁴ About 100,000 men, women, and children from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia transit through Djibouti each year, most heading to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, or other Middle Eastern countries. Since March 2015, Djiboutians, Yemenis, and others have also fled Yemen via Djibouti.¹⁵ These people are fleeing poverty, drought, war, or repression, looking for better opportunities abroad. However, these migrants and refugees are at grave risk of trafficking, forced labour, sexual exploitation and abuse, and forced prostitution.

The foreign military presence in Djibouti exacerbates these risks, providing a steady market in particular for “prostitutes”—women, girls, and boys who are forced to sell their bodies due to poverty or who are trafficked for sex. The combination of high numbers of foreign military personnel, flows of migrants, high numbers of refugees, and low unemployment



A grocery store in Djibouti City © Francisco Anzola/Flickr

and opportunities for work creates a powder keg for sexual violence and exploitation.

A history of (sexual) violence

The relationship between military bases and sexual violence is not an accident. It is deliberate and highly regulated by the military itself.¹⁶ During World War I, the French government set up brothels for soldiers to use—as it had done previously during its invasion and occupation of Algeria, and as it would continue to do for its Foreign Legion soldiers until 1978.¹⁷ The US government banned its soldiers from attending the French brothels during World War I, but by World War II, scholar Cynthia Enloe explains, it was working to “create racialized military prostitution systems,” including by setting up racially segregated brothels in Hawaii, Germany, postwar Korea, postwar Japan, and postinvasion Normandy, France. These systems continued after the war in Japan, the Philippines, and the Republic of Korea; it has been a “constant throughout the American military’s conduct of the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and its globally diffuse post-9/11 ‘war on terror’.”¹⁸

The institutionalisation of the sex “industry” around military bases is a situation “that’s been created by a series of human decision made over time (mostly by male military and government officials),” writes researcher David Vine. “Those decisions have created a predominantly male military environment, in which women’s visible presence is overwhelmingly reduced to one role: sex.”

Women are treated as sex objects as prostitutes outside the base and in pornography and United Service Organizations shows on the base.¹⁹

This influences the identities and behaviour of male soldiers as men. These identities are

deliberately constructed in order to help the military to function. “Institutionalized military prostitution draws on existing gender norms—cultural ideas about what it means to be a man and a woman—but it also intensifies these norms,” explains Vine. “It trains men to believe that using the sexual services of women is part of what it means to be a soldier and part of what it means to be a man. It helps shape what Enloe and others have called a ‘militarized masculinity,’ involving feelings of power and superiority over women and a willingness to inflict violence on anyone deemed inferior.”²⁰

It also facilitates a culture of impunity for sexual violence and for purchasing sex from those who are likely to have been trafficked and forced into prostitution. Djibouti is an extremely high-risk country for these challenges.²¹ The government as consistently failed to prosecute traffickers, operationalise its national action plan to combat trafficking, identify or provide protection for trafficking victims.²² It also has poor practices regarding those it arrests for prostitution, including children.²³

At the same time, the US government has failed to enforce its own laws prohibiting its soldiers or contractors from buying sex or facilitating trafficking. Since the 1990s, the US military has put in place increasingly strict regulations to combat its personnel’s engagement in prostitution and trafficking, yet is simultaneously expanding its military missions and facilities abroad, increasing the number of mostly male soldiers and contractors it sends overseas.

What has always been abusive, sexist behaviour exercised by US military personnel on and around foreign military bases is even more egregious today, violating ever more explicit US prohibitions yet continuing to escape any accountability. The commanders and contracting

authorities who wilfully neglect violations of US law and international human rights law in Djibouti are all the more culpable, given the explicit strictures they are now disregarding and actively undermining.

“Power without vulnerability”

The culture of impunity around trafficking and sexual exploitation when militaries are involved is nothing new. This sense of power without vulnerability, in the case of Djibouti, is in some ways matched by the type of military operations carried out there.

The emphasis on special operations, particularly out of the US base, is critical. The US special forces are among the US military’s most male-dominated units. According to a Pentagon-sponsored survey by the RAND Corporation, 85 per cent of men oppose integrating women into special forces units.²⁴

Similarly, private military and security companies tend to intensify gender inequalities compared to public militaries, many of which are in the process of “integrating” men and women into combat roles. Women are a minority in private armies and, because they are private, there are far fewer gender equity guidelines.²⁵ There have been glimpses of the levels of misogyny of which such companies are capable. For example, DynCorp, which has provided support for US military operations for 50 years, failed to hold its employees accountable when they were engaged in illicit trafficking, sexual enslavement, and rape of women in post-conflict Bosnia.²⁶

Both the special forces and private mercenaries have an air of invulnerability and impunity. So too do some of their missions in Djibouti, such as those involving armed drones. These “unmanned” systems enable their operators to

strike targets far away at a moment’s notice without any warning. Air Force official David Deptula has stated, “The real advantage of unmanned aerial systems is that they allow you to project power without projecting vulnerability.”²⁷

However, “projecting power without vulnerability” also may affect traditional hegemonic masculinities. The development and perpetuation of the militarized masculinity necessary to sustain war appears to be being mutated by the use of technology that separates the body from the battlefield. Mechanising warfare and protecting the soldier from risk of bodily harm seems in contradiction to the ethos of militarised masculinity. Engaging an “enemy” from a distance to which he or she cannot respond is like shooting someone in the back. It is the antithesis of methods of warfare that celebrate bravery, courage, and sacrifice.

“The attempt to eradicate all direct reciprocity in any exposure to hostile violence transforms not only the material conduct of armed violence technically, tactically, and psychically, but also the traditional principles of a military ethos officially based on bravery and a sense of sacrifice,” argues French philosopher Grégoire Chamayou in *A Theory of the Drone*.²⁸ “One of the troubles with unmanned aerial vehicles is literally the peril of becoming ‘unmanned’ in every sense of the term.” He also argues that this is why some Air Force officers initially resisted the general adoption of armed drones. “Obviously the drones threatened their own employment, their professional qualifications, and their institutional position, but the threat was also to their own virility, which was largely associated with the taking of risks.”²⁹

Strategic hub or chokepoint of violence?

The expanding use of armed drones is not yet known to be increasing rates of sexual violence by military personnel or within the military. Many factors on military bases facilitate or even condone sexual violence. The history of US military bases around the world clearly show the threat posed to women and girls by the institutionalisation of women's sexual objectification by military systems and personnel. In Djibouti, this threat may be reinforced by the further dehumanisation of warfare and the perceived "emasculatation" of soldiers through the growing use of armed drones to kill remotely, where at the same time the sense of "power without vulnerability" is enhanced.

In Djibouti, the symbiotic economic and political relationship between the foreign military powers and the "host" country seems to be a deterrent to any of the governments involved to confront

the human rights abuses by their own soldiers or by their host government. The foreign militaries continue to rely on Djibouti as a strategic location for military operations in what one observer describes as "a joint globalised security architecture." Though as other analysts have pointed out, it is also a place of "well-armed superpowers jostling in a city of closely guarded secrets, raising the stakes on the militarisation of trade routes and security chokepoints."³⁰

It is also a chokepoint of violence against local populations, particularly women. History has shown that foreign military bases, regardless of the nature of their operations, undermine human rights, increase geopolitical tensions, and facilitate sexual violence. This mode of militarism is damaging to local people, local economies, and as Vine has argued, "they've helped lock us inside a permanently militarized society that has made all of us—everyone on this planet—less secure."³¹



Remote warfare in Djibouti

Foreign military bases

At least six countries have constructed military bases in Djibouti: the United States, China, France, Japan, Italy, and soon Saudi Arabia. At least another four countries—the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, and Russia—have forces operating inside the country, with their troops either living on other countries' bases or in hotels. The total annual rent being paid by foreign governments to Djibouti for leasing these bases, without including associated development aid funds, is over \$300 million.

United States

The US Navy operates a base at Camp Lemonnier, near the Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport. It is a former French Foreign Legion outpost and was previously used as a CIA "black site" where terrorism suspects were detained without charges and allegedly tortured.³² The US military began stationing troops there shortly after 11 September 2001, moving 800 special operations troops there by the following year.³³ In 2003, Camp Lemonnier became the primary regional base for supporting Operation Enduring Freedom–Horn of Africa. It is currently home to about 4000 US and allied military and civilian personnel and Department of Defense contractors. The base also employs about 1100 local and third-country workers.³⁴

In 2005, the US government made a five-year land-use agreement with the Djibouti government. In 2006, the United States signed a separate agreement to expand the camp's boundaries to 500 acres.³⁵ In 2010, it exercised

the first of two five-year renewal options and in 2014 it signed a twenty-year lease worth \$63 million a year, with an extra \$7 million per year in developmental aid.³⁶

From 2003 to 2014, the US Department of Defense spent about \$500 million on a variety of construction projects at Camp Lemonnier, including aircraft hangers, taxiways, a recreation centre, a water production and distribution centre, and a wastewater treatment plant.³⁷ As of 2015, "Military contracting documents reveal plans for an investment of up to \$180 million or more in construction at Camp Lemonnier," investigative journalist Nick Turse has found. "Chief among the projects will be the laying of 54,500 square meters of taxiways 'to support medium-load aircraft' and the construction of a 185,000-square-meter Combat Aircraft Loading Area. In addition, plans are in the works to erect modular maintenance structures, hangars, and ammunition storage facilities."³⁸ Contracts have also been awarded for the construction of a fitness centre and Joint Headquarters Facility. "In the master plan," Captain Rick Cook has indicated, "there are close to three quarters of a billion dollars worth of construction projects that we still would like to do at Camp Lemonnier over the next ten to fifteen years."³⁹

The operations of Camp Lemonnier are shrouded in secrecy. Some is known from unclassified or leaked classified documents and investigative reporting. "Virtually the entire 500-acre camp is dedicated to counterterrorism," wrote Craig Whitlock of *The Washington Post* in 2012, "making it the only installation of its kind in the Pentagon's global network of bases."⁴⁰

Antiterrorism and antipiracy

Camp Lemonnier houses the Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM).⁴¹ The objective of the CJTF-HOA is to “effectively counter violent extremist organisations in East Africa.” Camp Lemonnier is a major hub for the Task Force’s antiterrorism initiatives in Africa and the Arabian peninsula, particularly in Somalia and Yemen.⁴²

Camp Lemonnier is also the logistics hub for antipiracy and other multilateral missions in the region and provides military cooperation and training to allied African states, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, as well as Mauritius, the Comoros, and the Seychelles. The base further provides selected support for AMISOM, the African Union force in Somalia.⁴³ In February 2015, the US and Djibouti announced a new partnership between the US National Guard and the Djiboutian Armed Forces.⁴⁴

Special forces

The Camp also hosts Special Forces units with the US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). After the attack on the US embassy in Benghazi, Libya, the US created a 150-member rapid response force based in Djibouti.⁴⁵ The East Africa Response Force was deployed to South Sudan in late December 2013 when armed factions surrounded the US embassy in Juba.⁴⁶ The special forces operating from Camp Lemonnier, according to officials, “is at the forefront in this region in implementing U.S.

policy on the ‘new normal’ to protect our missions when there are uncertain conditions.”⁴⁷ The phrase “the new normal” apparently refers to “rapidly moving crises requiring military interventions”—not just in relation to isolated security threats but “in supporting the national security strategy” of the United States.⁴⁸ Investigative journalist Nick Turse has identified elements of the “new normal” in Africa as including “ever-increasing missions across the continent, ever more engagement with local proxies in ever more African countries, the construction of more new facilities in ever more countries, and a string of bases devoted to surveillance activities spreading across the northern tier of the continent. Add to this impressive build-up the three new rapid reaction forces, specialised teams ... and shadowy quick-response units.”⁴⁹

Drones

JSOC is also responsible for the operation of US drone strikes in the region. *The Washington Post* reported in 2012 orders to find, track, or kill people the US has designated terrorists were increasingly delivered to Camp Lemonnier. Originally, the Pentagon described Lemonnier as temporary, but it has “hardened into the U.S. military’s first permanent drone war base.”⁵⁰

After six drones armed with Hellfire missiles crashed, one only 1.5 kilometres from Djibouti City, the US moved its drones to Chabelley airfield in 2013, about 10 kilometres away from the main base.⁵¹ While this was thought to be temporary, in June 2015 the US made a “long-term implementing arrangement” with Djibouti to



A crashed US drone in Djibouti. Photo from a declassified Accident Investigation Board.

establish Chabelley as an “enduring” base, allocating \$7.6 million to construct a new perimeter fence around the base.⁵² The US Air Force also reportedly installed a “tactical automated security system,” a suite of integrated sensors, thermal imaging devices, radar, cameras, and communications.⁵³

Camp Lemonnier was known as “the busiest Predator drone base outside the Afghan war zone.”⁵⁴ Documents leaked to *The Intercept* in 2015 indicated that at the time, the base operated ten MQ-1 Predators and four MQ-9 Reapers.⁵⁵ However, the Predator drones have reportedly since been removed from Djibouti, after more than 100 missions in Yemen and Somalia.⁵⁶ From Chabelley, investigative journalist Nick Turse found, US drone missions cover “Yemen, southwest Saudi Arabia, a large swath of Somalia, and parts of Ethiopia and

southern Egypt.”⁵⁷ The drones are flown via satellite link by pilots at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada and Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico.⁵⁸ They are maintained and launched in Djibouti by an Air Force squadron. *The Washington Post* reported in 2012 that the unit designed a uniform patch emblazoned with a skull, crossbones, and the nickname “East Africa Air Pirates”.⁵⁹



Based on an internal US Department of Defense report from 2013 obtained by *The Intercept*, Camp Lemonnier also housed “six U-28As—a single-engine aircraft that conducts surveillance for special operations forces—and two P-3 Orions, a four-engine turboprop aircraft originally developed for maritime patrols but since repurposed for use over African countries.” The report also indicates eight F-15E Strike Eagles, fighter jets that are faster and more heavily armed than drones. “By August 2012,” explains Nick Turse, “an average of 16 drones and four fighter jets were taking off or landing there each day.”⁶⁰

According to The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, since 2002 the US has conducted at least 254 confirmed drone strikes in Yemen, with a total of 890–1228 people killed, over 200 of which were civilians. The Bureau has recorded a number of other possible drone strikes with hundreds more killed. In Somalia, since 2007 the US has conducted at least 50 drone strikes, with 325–482 deaths, about 30 of which have been civilians.⁶¹

China

Since 2008, China has been engaged in multilateral anti-piracy operations and protection of its own shipping vessels transiting through the Gulf of Aden. Most of China’s \$1 billion/day trade with the EU transits this route.⁶² It is the first time China has deployed military forces outside of its sovereign territory to protect Chinese interests. According to Chatham House, the Chinese Navy has protected vessels from over 50 countries in cooperation with the United States, NATO, and the European Union.⁶³

In February 2016, China began constructing its first overseas military base, at the port city of Obock. It describes the base as a “support

facility” or “logistical facility” rather than a military base. The Chinese defence ministry indicated that the “facilities will mainly be used for logistical support and personnel recuperation of the Chinese armed forces conducting such missions as maritime escort in the Gulf of Aden and waters off the Somali coast, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance.”⁶⁴ China officially opened the base on 1 August 2017.

Others have indicated concern with China’s base construction in Djibouti. Indian analysts are worried the establishment of a Chinese base along the periphery of the Indian Ocean will lead to more bases encircling the region. The US government is monitoring the deployment of China’s nuclear powered submarines in the Indian Ocean. “If these submarines continue to operate in the region and perhaps even make an appearance at Obock, it would suggest that China sees its Djibouti facility as a naval base designed to fully support the PLAN [People’s Liberation Army-Navy]’s expeditionary expansion toward West Asia and beyond,” suggests a writer with *The Diplomat*.⁶⁵

The base at Obock has access to an airport, which was constructed by a Chinese company. China will reportedly pay \$100 million per year to lease the base.⁶⁶ According to Djiboutian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, China will pay \$20 million a year for a ten-year lease of the base, with an option to extend for another ten years. Speaking to a journalist, he indicated that China will likely station a few thousand troops and military staff at the base.⁶⁷

China’s interest in the region is deeply connected to its economic interests, including the construction by the China Petrochemical Corporation of a 300 MW geothermal plant on Lake Assal.⁶⁸ China is also heavily investing in Djibouti’s infrastructure, giving the country loans

to build a water pipeline and railway connection with Ethiopia. The loans come to \$814 million, half of Djibouti's annual GDP. "Djibouti's public and publicly guaranteed debt burden is likely to reach 81 per cent of GDP next year, mostly as a result of Chinese financing," writes investigative reporter Katrina Manson for *FT Magazine*.⁶⁹ The 756 km, \$3.5 billion, Djibouti-Ethiopia rail-link is the key infrastructural development from China's loans. "It directly links Djibouti's Doraleh Container Port, and the adjacent petroleum and bulk-cargo facilities, to Addis Ababa's burgeoning industrial zones," explains Manson. "Beijing's long-term commercial ambitions are accelerating; a Chinese company has a stake in Djibouti's Port Authority and in mid-April a 'strategic partnership' with the Qingdao, China's third largest port, was announced."⁷⁰

Part of the agreement over China's military base, however, involves not just Chinese investment in infrastructure. The deal apparently also establishes a free trade zone in Djibouti, increases Djibouti's role as a transshipment hub for trade between China and the rest of the world, and creates a legal framework allowing Chinese banks to operate in Djibouti.⁷¹

France

Until recently, France had more troops and aircraft permanently based in Djibouti than the

United States. The French military maintains 1900 military personnel in Djibouti, including units of the Army, Air Force, and Navy.⁷² 1400 are permanently based at Camp Monclar, situated between Djibouti City, the airport, and Camp Lemonnier. About 500 troops are on rotation between France and other regional bases.⁷³ After Djibouti gained independence from France in 1977, the French army provided the Djiboutian government's core finance, and guaranteed external defences in exchange for military bases and extensive training facilities.⁷⁴ In 2003, France agreed to pay Djibouti about \$36 million per year for use of military facilities in the country, with additional funds going to support civil-military projects, equipment purchases, and other developmental aid.⁷⁵

The French forces stationed in Djibouti (FFDj) also run a training centre for Djiboutian military forces. These forces also cooperate bilaterally with other countries in the Horn of Africa and with the African Standby Force of the African Union. The French force helps train Somali and Ugandan security forces for operations in Somalia, and it also supports the European anti-piracy operation, hosting German and Spanish troops.⁷⁶ It is also involved in intelligence and logistical cooperation with the United States.⁷⁷ The French base shares runways with the US and Japanese forces based in Djibouti, and with Djibouti's international airport, Ambouli.



Japan

Since 2011, Djibouti has also hosted the first Japanese foreign military base to be established since 1945.⁷⁸ Ten percent of the commercial ships passing through the the Bab al-Mandab are Japanese, giving financial incentive to participate in anti-piracy efforts in the region.⁷⁹

From 2009, the Japanese military temporarily used the US base before establishing its own, near Camp Lemonnier, in July 2011. "Around 600 members of its Maritime Self-Defence Forces rotate between Japan's naval vessels operating from the port of Djibouti and the camp," reports Chatham House.⁸⁰

Japan is reported to pay \$30 million per year for the base. It includes a runway, hangar, gym, and Japanese-style bathing facilities.⁸¹ It will host Japan's Lockheed Martin P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft and a permanent port facility, and is focused on escorting ships through the Gulf of Aden sea route as part of anti-piracy efforts.⁸² Two months after signing a status of forces agreement with Djibouti in April 2009, Japan deployed two new destroyers, the 4,550-ton Harusame and the 3,500-ton Amagiri, off the Horn of Africa.⁸³

Italy

Italy deployed its Task Force Air, complete with a Predator drone, to the EU Naval Force from 2014–2015. The drone was remotely piloted by personnel deployed to the French Chabelly Base in Djibouti and Italian air force personnel at Amendola Air Force Base in Italy. It completed 28 missions, the last on 5 February 2015.⁸⁴ More recently Italy has constructed a base "alongside Djibouti's one paved road that leads directly into Somalia."⁸⁵

Saudi Arabia

In 2016, Saudi Arabia signed an agreement with Djibouti to set up a military base and to establish a joint military commission to discuss cooperation between the two countries.⁸⁶ The Saudi interest in Djibouti is related to its war against the Houthis in Yemen. Djibouti supports the Saudi-led coalition in this war, providing the military alliance with landing rights in advance of the construction of its military base.⁸⁷ A Saudi base in Djibouti opens "a new front against the Houthis, who then face the prospect of being attacked from another axis," explains analyst Ben Ho Wan Beng. "Moreover, Iran has allegedly supplied the Houthis with materiel via ships in the Gulf of Aden, and a Saudi military presence in Djibouti could help check this."⁸⁸



Other foreign militaries

Russia

Russia has deployed warships to Djibouti as part of its anti-piracy initiative in the region since 2008. In 2010, Djibouti granted Russia the use of port facilities, but the agreement did not provide for the establishment of a permanent base.⁹⁰ The Russian government reportedly requested the establishment of such a base in 2014, but the new US-Djibouti agreement signed that year, doubling the rent for Camp Lemonnier, appeared to “shut down efforts by Russia to lease land and ensure military landing rights.” Djiboutian foreign minister Mahmoud Ali Youssef said officials were not pressured by the United States over a deal with Russia, but that Djibouti wanted to avoid “conflicting interests between those countries.”⁹¹

Spain

In 2008, Djibouti became the operational base for EUNAVFOR Atalanta, the European Union’s first joint naval mission. It’s an anti-piracy operation at sea off the Horn of Africa and in the western Indian Ocean. The EU naval forces use both the French and US bases in Djibouti.⁹² Spain’s Orion Detachment has been deployed in Djibouti since 2008⁹³ and has been leading EUNAVFOR Atalanta since May 2015. Rear Admiral Alfonso Gómez Fernández de Córdoba commands “the warship ‘Galicia’, 185 troops who do six-month tours of duty, and a vigilance aircraft with 55 operatives deployed in Djibouti.”⁹⁴ The Spanish troops based in Djibouti live in the Djibouti Palace Kempinski.⁹⁵

Germany

In addition to its contributions to EUNAVFOR Atalanta, Germany has been involved in

Operation Enduring Freedom since 2002, and maintains a contingent of 30–80 troops in Djibouti. The German military does not have its own base; instead its troops occupy some bungalows at the airport and stay at the Sheraton Hotel.⁹⁶

United Kingdom

In 2014, the UK Ministry of Defence revealed that liaison staff are embedded with US forces in the Horn of Africa. Then-defence minister Mark Francois explained, “As embedded military personnel within a US headquarters they come under the command and control of the US armed forces, but remain subject to UK law, policy and military jurisdiction.”⁹⁷

Three officers are based at Camp Lemonnier, though the Ministry denies they are involved in coordinating drone strikes. However, *The Guardian* has reported that British surveillance drones are operating on anti-pirate patrols in the Red Sea and off the coast of East Africa. The NGO Reprieve’s legal director Kat Craig argued that stationing UK personnel “at a base which has been identified as playing a key part in the secretive, unaccountable and illegal campaign of drone strikes in Yemen raises serious questions, as does the Yemeni president’s statement that Britain is involved in targeting the strikes.”⁹⁸

Contractors

The number of contractors operating in Djibouti is unknown. Some are employed by private military and security companies (PMSCs). Also known as mercenaries, these military contractors (often former soldiers) generally offer military assistance and security services and are usually armed. In Djibouti, such contractors have been hired as armed security guards on commercial ships, while others have

been hired to assist with operations on the military base. Other contractors are employed by construction firms hired by governments to build elements of the base. Others still provide support services on bases.

The majority of the research on contractors included in this report is focused on those employed by the United States. While the number of individual contractors present in Djibouti is not known, it seems there are at least 1000 contractors stationed at Camp Lemonnier, most of which are employed by US-based companies. Most of these contractors—from militarised security forces to engineering and construction workers—are men, though sex-disaggregated data is not available.

There are currently no mechanisms to hold private contractors accountable under national or international law, though in 2014, the Office for the Under-Secretary of Defense issued a memorandum regarding requirements for contractor personnel performing in Djibouti. Among other things, this memorandum indicates that the contractor shall ensure its personnel are familiar with and comply with all applicable US, host country, and third country national laws; treaties and international agreements; US regulations, directives, instructions, policies, and procedures; and force protection, security, health, or safety orders, directives, and instructions issued by the USAFRICOM Commander. The memorandum also instructs the contractor to ensure its personnel are aware of their rights and to conduct security and background checks on all employees.⁹⁹

Private military and security companies (PMSCs) operating at sea

Most PMSCs operating in Djibouti seem to serve on merchant vessels as private armed

guards as an antipiracy measure. It is unclear how many PMSCs are currently active in Djibouti, though an internet search on companies offering their services in the area returns many options.

In 2011, the International Chamber of Shipping began allowing cargo ships to carry private armed guards when travelling through waters facing piracy problems. By 2012, some 60 per cent of cargo ships were employing armed guards. “However, no coordinated set of international guidelines regulates PMSCs and the hiring and training of private armed guards to aid in the fight against piracy. States instead each make their own rules.”¹⁰⁰

The use of armed private security personnel on board merchant ships faces a number of legal restrictions. “Arms and armed guards on board ships navigating the high seas are primarily governed by the law of the flag State,” though “PMSCs and their personnel may be obliged to observe, regulations of the State where the company is incorporated.” Furthermore, “If a commercial ship relying on private armed guards passes through the territorial waters of a third State or calls into port in a foreign State, compliance with coastal and port State laws and regulations on arms must also be ensured, and these may again differ from the relevant law of the flag State.”¹⁰¹

Some PMSCs either acquire coastal or port state authorisations and licences necessary for their arms and armed guards, or they lease state-owned material. In the case of Djibouti, the government “not only sells permits for PMSCs to operate from its port with weapons, but it also installed a gun-rental scheme whereby merchant ships relying on PMSCs can rent arms and take them on board for a fee.” The Djibouti Maritime Security Services has been given

authority via a presidential decree to control PMSCs operating from Djibouti, including the transit, rental, and storage of weapons.¹⁰²

In one case, the US government intervened to prevent a PMSC from operating in the region. In February 2009, the government of Djibouti gave permission to the PMSC Blackwater (aka XE Services; now known as Academi) to operate an armed ship in the port of Djibouti and to “use lethal force against pirates.” However, pressure from the US government prevented the company from beginning its operations in Djibouti.¹⁰³

Blackwater’s conduct in Afghanistan and Iraq has come under intense scrutiny by human rights groups and journalists, including in relation to its employees killing Iraqi civilians.¹⁰⁴ However, it is most likely that the US government’s intervention to prevent the company from operating in Djibouti had more to do with Blackwater founder Erik Prince being under investigation for ties to Chinese intelligence.¹⁰⁵

Contractors on base at Camp Lemonnier

Over the years, the US Department of Defense (DoD) has contracted several US-based companies to conduct most of the construction projects for Camp Lemonnier and Chabelley airfield. It also contracts private companies to support military operations. The majority of these contracts are administered by the Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC).

In 2015, the Inspector General of the US Department of Defense determined that DoD officials were not effectively administering base operations support contracts at the camp. Its report stated that NAVFAC officials “did not ensure plans for assessing contractor performance” at Camp Lemonnier in regard to security operations, fire and emergency

services, or supply services. The report notes that failing to meet contract requirements “could have a direct effect on the life and safety” of the base’s personnel and assets.¹⁰⁶

The following is not an exhaustive list of all contractors that are or have been contracted to work at Camp Lemonnier. Where possible, it indicates the nature and value of the contract, as well as information on the company’s lobbying history and connections to the US government, including the military.

Military operations

Computer Sciences Corporation. In 2008, this Falls Church, VA-based company was awarded a \$6.6 million contract for technical support to operating forces, including in Djibouti.¹⁰⁷

Lobbying since 1998: \$17.5 million
Election contributions since 1990: \$2.87 million
Revolving door: 17 out of 19 CSC lobbyists in 2013–2014 previously held government jobs
Political shares: John Boehner (R-Ohio), former Speaker of the House of Representatives, owns shares in CSC.¹⁰⁸

DynCorp Systems and Solutions (an affiliate of Cerberus Capital Management). In documents entered as evidence in the lawsuit by Mohammad al-Asad, a former CIA detainee who sued the government of Djibouti for its alleged role in hosting CIA “black sites,” private contractors were implicated, including DynCorp.¹⁰⁹ DynCorp (acquired by Computer Sciences Corporation) had a government aviation contract to organize flights at short notice for US government personnel, including taking care of arrangements such as overflight permissions, landing, and handling fees. The documents indicate flights that correspond with black site prisoners being transported.¹¹⁰

The company has provided support for US military operations through contract field teams for 50 years. DynCorp employees operating in post-conflict Bosnia were engaged in illicit trafficking, sexual enslavement, and rape of women.¹¹¹

Lobbying since 2002: \$21.5 million
Election contributions since 2000: \$6.3 million
Revolving door: 15 out of 22 Cerberus lobbyists in 2013–2014 previously held government jobs¹¹²

General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. In 2015, this firm based in Poway, California was awarded a \$57 million modification to its contract for logistics support to the Warrior (aka Grey Eagle) armed drone, including in Djibouti.¹¹³

General Atomics is the leading designer and manufacturer of Predator and Reaper drones and other remotely piloted aircraft. Neal Blue, CEO and Chairman, served in the US Air Force.

Lobbying since 1998: \$36.3 million
Election contributions since 1990: \$6.57 million
Revolving door: 29 out of 40 GA lobbyists in 2013–2014 previously held government jobs¹¹⁴

Leidos Inc. In 2015, this VA-based company was awarded a \$9.1 million contract for “preparation, shipment, and management of Navy repairable assets to the Technical Assistance for Repairable Processing services in support of the Naval Supply Systems Command weapon systems Support,” including in relation to US operations in Djibouti.¹¹⁵ In 2014, it was awarded a \$150 million contract modification to support the Saturn Arch programme, which is an aerial device meant to “neutralise” improvised explosive devices, and to provide continued operations, sustainment, and integration of aircraft platforms hosting sensors. Some of the work was performed in Djibouti.¹¹⁶ In 2015 the Army awarded Leidos a \$72 million contract to continue its support of Saturn Arch.¹¹⁷

Lobbying since 1998: \$32.3 million
Election contributions since 1990: \$7.9 million
Revolving door: 34 out of 43 Leidos lobbyists in 2013–2014 previously held government jobs¹¹⁸

Mission Essential Personal. The US Army awarded this Columbus, Ohio-based company a \$679 million contract for linguistic and translation services in a number of countries, including Djibouti.¹¹⁹

Lobbying since 2007: \$682,000
Election contributions since 2008: \$68,207¹²⁰

Scitor Corporation. In October 2014, this Virginia-based company was awarded a \$25 million contract by the Department of Defense for “counter-insurgency operations” in Djibouti, including the provision of “high-altitude light detection and ranging off-nadir experimentation that includes technology demonstrations and assessments for counter insurgency operations to meet the objectives to advance state of the art in high-altitude off-nadir data collections.” 65 per cent of the work was to be done in Djibouti and the rest in Baltimore, Maryland, with an estimated completion date of 25 September 2016.¹²¹

Construction and design

AECOM Technical Services, Inc. In 2015, this Los Angeles-based design firm was awarded a \$45 million contract for design projects for US Navy facilities in various locations, including Djibouti. The completion date is May 2020.¹²²

BL Harbert International. In 2014, Birmingham, Alabama-based BL Harbert International LLC was awarded an \$18.4 million contract to build a military housing structure. In 2013, the same company was awarded a \$150 million contract.¹²³

Caddell Construction Co. In 2013, the Montgomery, Alabama-based Caddell was granted a \$36.2 million contract for the design and construction of a headquarters building and joint operations centre for command and control.¹²⁴

ECC-MEZZ LLC, based in Burlingame, California, was awarded a \$6.96 million contract in September 2015 for the construction of a perimeter boundary fence at Chabelley airfield, from which the US armed drones are kept. Work is expected to be complete by January 2017.¹²⁵ It was subsequently awarded \$6.9 million on this contract.¹²⁶ In 2012, it was awarded a \$3.1 million contract for construction on security fencing, a general warehouse, and road paving at Camp Lemonnier.¹²⁷

Dover Vantage, Inc. This NY-based company is one of nine companies awarded a \$25 million contract for construction, repair, and demolition at Camp Lemonnier in April 2016, with an expected completion date of 2021. The other companies awarded this joint contract are based in Afghanistan, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and UAE.¹²⁸

Dover Vantage was recently acquired by MAG Services Group, which was established in 2009 to provide engineering and infrastructure services to the US and coalition forces in Afghanistan. It is headquartered in Dubai.¹²⁹

KBR (Kellogg Brown and Root Services Inc.). Houston, Texas-based KBR, a former subsidiary of Halliburton, has also received millions in contracts for Camp Lemonnier. In 2012, it received a \$127mn contract for “public safety, air operations, facility support, vehicle maintenance and environmental services,” and “supply operations, housing, utilities, laundry, food and recreation services.”¹³⁰ In 2014, it received a \$50 million contract for construction,

maintenance, renovation and repairs at the base, with a completion date of September 2019.¹³¹ In 2015, it received a \$60 million contract for base operations support.¹³²

Lester L. Lyles, Board of Directors, is a retired four-star General of the US Air Force. He is also on the Board of Directors of General Dynamics, another major military contractor, and a member of the International Security Advisory Board at the US Department of State. He has served on the Defense Science Board in the Pentagon since 2009 and served in the White House on the President's Intelligence Advisory Board from 2009–2013.¹³³ Its contracts in Djibouti are not its first US Navy projects; during the American war in Viet Nam it built cells for the infamously grim South Vietnamese Con Son Prison and later, as part of Halliburton, built “isolation cells” at Guantánamo Bay.¹³⁴

Lobbying since 2007: \$1.26 million
Election contributions since 1990: \$1.6 million
Political shares: Thad Cochran (R-MS) and David Joyce (R-OH) own shares in KBR.¹³⁵

METAG Construction USA. In 2012, this Virginia Beach company was awarded a \$19.5 million contract for construction of “an aircraft logistics apron, a concrete aircraft apron, and an expansion of taxiways at Camp Lemonnier.”¹³⁶

Michael-Bruno. The first US business to open an office in Djibouti, the company has worked closely with the US military and local authorities since 2007. It has provided architectural design, engineering, and construction management services for several projects at Camp Lemonnier, including under PAE/Lockheed Martin contracts.¹³⁷

Michael Sedge, Chief Executive Officer, served in the US Navy before developing another company's global military marketing network. Vice President Bruno Giuseppe worked as a construction contractor for the US Navy and NATO.



Camels rest as a US Navy landing craft transports armoured vehicles in Djibouti © DVIDSHUB/Flickr

PAE Government Services. This Lockheed Martin subsidiary, based in Los Angeles, California, has received hundreds of millions of dollars worth of contracts at Camp Lemonnier for “general management and administration services; public safety (harbor security, security operations and emergency management program); ordnance; air operations (airfield

facilities and passenger terminal and cargo handling); supply; morale, welfare and recreation; galley; housing (bachelor quarters and laundry); facility support (facilities investment, janitorial, pest control services and refuse services); utilities (water, waste water and electrical); base support vehicle and equipment; and environmental.”¹³⁸

John Heller, Chief Executive Officer, and Karl Williams, Chief Operations Officer, are both graduates of the US Military Academy at West Point. Williams also served in the US Army. Both previously worked with other military contractors including L-3 Communications and Lockheed Martin. Rich Greene, President of Global Logistics and Stability Operations, previously worked with the US State Department for 27 years. Kenneth Myers, President of the National Security Solutions business unit, worked for seven years as Director of the Threat Reduction Agency and US Strategic Command’s Center for Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction. He was previously a staff

member on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Whit Cobb, Senior Vice President and General Counsel, was previously Deputy General Counsel of major military contractor BAE Systems and of the Department of Defense. He was also previously an attorney with the US Army.¹³⁹

Lobbying since 1998: \$217.2 million
 Election contributions since 1990: \$30.2 million
 Revolving door: 74 out of 109 Lockheed Martin lobbyists in 2013–2014 have held government jobs
 Political shares: Roy Blunt (R-MO), Susan M Collins (R-ME), and Mike Conaway (R-TX) own shares in Lockheed Martin¹⁴⁰

P&S Construction Inc. This North Chelmsford, Massachusetts-based company was awarded a \$15.2 million contract for the construction of a new telecommunication facility to replace existing building and construction of an aircraft maintenance hangar at Camp Lemonnier. As part of a joint contract with five other companies—ITSI Gilbane Co., ECC-MEZZ Joint Venture, Joint Venture SKE Djibouti (German-based), Lakeshore TolTest Corp., and AMEC Environment and Infrastructure Inc.—P&S Construcion was also awarded a \$75 million design-build construction contract for various base projects.¹⁴¹

Tetra Tech EC, Inc. This Lakewood, CO-based firm was awarded a \$59 million contract in 2012 for the design and construction of contrarised living units for lodging at Camp Lemonnier.¹⁴²

Local contractors

In February 2015, the US State Department and Djiboutian Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed that local companies would be given preference to win goods and services contracts at Camp

Lemonnier.¹⁴³ However, the first such contract was only awarded in June 2016 to Nalco Construction Co., to renovate a conference room.¹⁴⁴ The contract is worth \$28,685.¹⁴⁵

Other Djibouti-owned companies, such as **GSK Group**, which is comprised of 25 corporations operating in Djibouti, Somaliland, Somalia, and the UAE in shipping, ship chartering, cargo surveying, container storage services, IT support, human resources support services, security services, and construction, do not appear to have been awarded contracts at Camp Lemonnier or the other foreign military bases.

In 2013, local and third-country workers hired by US-based contractors went on strike at Camp Lemonnier. After receiving a \$55 million contract from NAVFAC, the US company KBR planned to cut its base operation support staff who cover janitorial, laundry, and food service work from 1000 to 600 people. The remaining 600 workers went on strike over the cuts, protesting the idea that half the people would continue doing the same amount of work.¹⁴⁶ During the strike, US troops filled in for the striking workers.¹⁴⁷



Looking down the rows of tents in KBR village at Site 4
© Keo the Younger/Flickr

Arms transfers and trafficking

Transfers

In 2015, the value for arms transfers to Djibouti was \$7 million, down from \$12 million in 2014.¹⁴⁸ The US has been one of the biggest suppliers to Djibouti. From 2003–2006, the US sold \$26 million worth of “defense articles and services” to Djibouti; from 2007–2010 this was \$11 million, and in 2010 it was \$4 million.¹⁴⁹

Recent arms transfers to Djibouti¹⁵⁰

Combat helicopters

Two Mi-24P/Mi-35 from Belarus in 2005

Transport aircraft

Two PW100 from Canada in 2014; one MA60 from China in 2014; two Shorts-360 in 2014

Armour fire support vehicle

Five WMA-301 Assaulter from Italy in 2015

Landing craft

One EDIC from France in 2012

Self-propelled gun

Ten M-109A1 155mm from Italy in 2013

Armoured patrol vehicle

Seven Puma from Italy in 2013

Armoured personnel carrier

Eight BTR-80 from Russia in 2002; nine Casspir from South Africa in 2000; fifteen Cougar and ten RG-33 from the United States in 2014

or ferry.¹⁵¹ Traffickers also use small islands off Djibouti’s coast as a staging ground for smuggling operations.¹⁵² In particular, weapons, ammunition, and landmines have reportedly been trafficked through Djibouti by Iranian and Yemeni networks to al Shabaab in Somalia.¹⁵³ A Yemeni official, commenting on arms trafficked from Africa across the Red Sea, noted that “some arms shipments are smuggled to islands off the coast of Djibouti for storage, and are then later smuggled into Yemen.”¹⁵⁴

Legislation

Djibouti has signed but not yet ratified the international Arms Trade Treaty. It has not signed the United Nations Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition. It has designated a national point of contact and national coordinating body for the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

Djibouti has acceded to two regional agreements on arms control. As a member of the League of Arab States, Djibouti adopted the Arab Model Law on Weapons, Ammunitions, Explosives and Hazardous Material in January 2002. On 21 April 2004, Djibouti adopted the Nairobi Protocol for the Prevention, Control and Reduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States, a legally-binding multilateral protocol. It has since signed and ratified this Protocol.

Trafficking

There is concern that Djibouti’s ports are being used to traffic weapons. After arrival, arms are forwarded to their destination by road, rail, air,



In a 2006 study on Djibouti's arms control efforts, SaferAfrica and Saferworld found that the country's national legislation conforms to most provisions of relevant regional and international agreements: "Authorisation is required for the import, export and transit of small arms and ammunition; and records must be maintained on the import of small arms." However, the report notes that there are "fundamental absences". For example, there is "only a limited requirement relating to the information to be included on import and export licences;" there is no requirement for the use of end-user certificates; and there is no system or requirement for the marking of small arms at the time of import. Similarly, there is no system or requirement for the marking of small arms at the time of manufacture or for keeping records on small arms manufacturing.¹⁵⁵

In Djibouti, the activities of arms brokers and transfer intermediaries are not specifically regulated by law.¹⁵⁶ While authorisation of the head of state is required for sale, transfer, and

transport of weapons, and records must be kept on weapons imports, there are no provisions for the safe storage of weapons nor is there any prohibition "on the pawning and pledging of small arms". There are also no provisions for the seizure, confiscation, forfeiture, disposal, or destruction of small arms, nor any controls to prevent the reactivation of deactivated weapons.¹⁵⁷

Guiding gun control legislation in Djibouti includes the Law No. 62 621 of 2 June 1962. The law's provisions relate to the import, export, transfer, carrying, and possession of arms, weapon items, ammunition, and military materials. The law requires registration of civilian-owned and -traded guns. The military and police are obligated to maintain records of the storage and movement of all firearms and ammunition under their control.¹⁵⁸ According to statistics from GunPolicy.org, the total of firearms held by civilians in Djibouti is 22,000, or 2.8 per cent. The Djiboutian military is reported to have 18,715 firearms and the police 1017.¹⁵⁹

Human rights in Djibouti

“Djibouti is less a country than a commercial city state controlled by one man, Ismail Omar Guelleh,” reads a US embassy cable published by WikiLeaks.¹⁶⁰ Guelleh is Djibouti’s second president since the country became independent from France in 1977, taking over from his uncle. In April 2016, Guelleh won an unprecedented fourth term as president with 87 per cent of the vote. Opposition parties and human rights groups said the election was preceded by political repression and restrictions on basic rights and freedoms.¹⁶¹ The 2015 Freedom House report on Djibouti argues that Guelleh’s Union for a Presidential Majority coalition party “has effectively usurped the state.”¹⁶²

The US State Department has critiqued the Djiboutian government for restricting free speech and assembly; using excessive force, including torture; and harassing and detaining government critics.¹⁶³ It has also criticised Djibouti’s failures to combat human trafficking and forced prostitution.¹⁶⁴ In addition, the country’s family laws discriminate against women and in some cases facilitate gender-based violence, such as female genital mutilation. Despite its critiques of Djibouti, and those of the UN, the US government (and others) continues to support the government through rent payments for military bases and other bilateral development aid programmes and arrangements. The presence of foreign militaries, as can be seen below, even facilitates some of the abuses over which the US, the UN, and other governments have expressed concern.

Human trafficking and sexual violence

About 100,000 men, women, and children from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia transit through Djibouti each year, most heading to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, or other Middle Eastern countries. Since March 2015, Yemenis and others have also fled Yemen via Djibouti.¹⁶⁵

There are several “push factors” contributing to “migration” from these countries.

Somalia has been embroiled in a civil war since 1991 and is wracked with violence from armed groups such as al-Shabaab as well as African Union and other international forces operating in the country, including US-executed drone strikes.

Yemen has been locked in civil war between Houthi rebels and the government of Abdo Rabo Mansour Hadi, who is backed by Saudi Arabia. A Saudi-led coalition has been bombing in populated areas throughout Yemen, rampantly violating international humanitarian law and human rights with weapons and guidance provided by the United States, United Kingdom, and other western countries.¹⁶⁶

In Ethiopia, the government continues to crack down on dissent, using “arbitrary arrests and prosecutions to silence journalists, bloggers, protesters, and supporters of opposition political parties. Police responded to peaceful protests ahead of elections with excessive force “and there was no indication of any government willingness to amend repressive legislation that

was increasingly condemned for violating international standards, including at Ethiopia's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council."¹⁶⁷ There are also many alleged abuses associated with Ethiopia's "villagization programme," under which 1.5 million rural people "were planned to be relocated, ostensibly to improve their access to basic services. Some relocations during the program's first year in Gambella region were accompanied by violence, including beatings, arbitrary arrests, and insufficient consultation and compensation."¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Eritrea's "climate of repression, violence and paranoia ... is prompting hundreds of people to flee everyday." A UN inquiry accused the government of "pervasive state control" and "ruthless repression," including through extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and incommunicado detentions.¹⁶⁹ Meanwhile, global warming and the El Niño effect have contributed to the worst drought in decades in East Africa.¹⁷⁰

The "pull factors," on the other hand, include promises of employment and peace. Those leaving their home countries are escaping poverty, drought, repression, or war—or a combination of these—and seeking a better future elsewhere. However, the hopes of finding jobs and stability often turn into nightmares of forced labour, sexual slavery, or sexual abuse and rape under the guise of "prostitution".

The International Organization on Migration and the US State Department have highlighted the risks of trafficking for people transiting through Djibouti. In its 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report, the State Department notes,

Some of these migrants are subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking in their intended destinations. In early 2015, the crisis in Yemen created a reverse influx of persons fleeing Yemen to Djibouti; the Government allowed over 30,000 people of diverse



Somali woman in Djibouti refugee camp Ali Addeh
© Sanne Terlingen, OneWorld

nationalities to enter freely and take refuge, some of whom endured various types of exploitation, possibly including trafficking, before their transit to Djibouti. Some Djiboutian and migrant women and girls are subjected to domestic servitude or sex trafficking in Djibouti City, the Ethiopia-Djibouti trucking corridor, and Obock, the main departure point for Yemen. Some migrants intending to be smuggled may be transported or detained against their will and subsequently subjected to trafficking, and other forms of abuse, in Djibouti. Smuggling networks, some of whose members are likely Djiboutian, sometimes charge exorbitantly high rents or kidnap and hold migrants, including children, for ransom; some migrant women reportedly were subjected to domestic servitude and forced prostitution in Djibouti to pay these ransoms. In addition, traffickers based in Yemen or Saudi Arabia, who reportedly intend to exploit migrants or sell women into prostitution or domestic servitude upon their arrival there, sometimes pay these ransoms. Some of Djibouti's older street children reportedly act as pimps of younger children. Parents sometimes force their children to beg on the streets as a source of familial income; children may also travel from foreign countries—including Ethiopia and Somalia—for begging in Djibouti. Children are also vulnerable to forced labor as domestic servants and, at times, coerced to commit petty crimes, such as theft.¹⁷¹

Smugglers traffic people along the same route migrants and refugees take from the Djibouti port of Obock to Yemen, which is only about 30km across the strait. According to migrants and refugees who make it to Yemen, many people go missing after making the trip. Women and girls are sometimes raped on board the traffickers' boats.¹⁷² Some are sold into sexual

slavery when they arrive in Yemen or Saudi Arabia.¹⁷³

The trip is expensive, so many people transiting through Djibouti stay there until they can pay a smuggler. Many end up in refugee camps. Ali Addeh has nearly 11,000 inhabitants, mostly Somalis. It has been Djibouti's largest refugee camp for 20 years. Investigative journalist Sanne Terlingen, interviewing women in the camp, found that rape there is common but not publicly discussed. Young girls become pregnant. The women will not collect firewood by themselves. Many girls leave the camp to find work in Djibouti City. None return to Ali Addeh.¹⁷⁴

"It is an open secret that sex work is widespread along the international trucking corridors and a major factor in the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa," writes Terlingen. From the Ali Addeh refugee camp to the nearest town of Ali Sadieh and on to Djibouti City, rest stops include shacks where sex workers are stationed. As sex work is illegal in Djibouti, when police conduct raids they often find young girls among the sex workers. Women and girls who make it to Djibouti City tend to live in poverty and work in brothels or nightclubs. If they get arrested, a US military contractor tells Terlingen, "undocumented migrant girls ... are deported unless they pay the police with money or sex."¹⁷⁵

The US Department of Labor's 2014 *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* report states:

In addition to Djiboutian girls, Ethiopian, Somalian and Eritrean migrant girls fall victim to forced domestic work and possibly to commercial sexual exploitation in Djibouti City; the Ethiopia-Djibouti trucking corridor; and Obock, the preferred departure point for Yemen. Girls from poor Djiboutian families may be sexually exploited as a means of

income. Limited evidence suggests younger children are sometimes exploited in commercial sexual exploitation by older children.¹⁷⁶

The report also finds that there was no established system for referring exploited children to social services. Instead, the government detained children arrested for “prostitution” and then transport those identified as non-Djiboutian to Ali Sabieh, near the Ethiopian border, where it would leave them there, “abandoned and vulnerable to re-trafficking.”¹⁷⁷

Foreign militaries, “prostitution,” and sexual violence

The presence of foreign militaries and private military and security contractors in Djibouti is a driving factor in the sexual exploitation of women and girls in the region. Foreign military service people use the sexual services of prostitutes in Djibouti City, many of whom are trafficked persons, young women with no other options for employment, or children forced into prostitution due to poverty. While the sex “industry” in Djibouti was not created to service the militaries, it is facilitated by their presence. This is in violation of some of the foreign militaries’ laws and Djibouti national law, and undermines attempts to combat trafficking and sexual violence.

During her investigations into trafficking in Djibouti, Terlingen visited the nightclub district in Djibouti City several times. The first time, she went with three US contractors. A French soldier and a Moroccan contractor later joined their group. Terlingen documents drunken soldiers and contractors from a variety of nationalities, extensive bar hopping, and purchasing of sex. An ambassador from another

country even tried to buy Terlingen off one of the US contractors, who informed him she was off limits. “At fifteen minutes past three, after sharing eight bottles of vodka with six people, the men offer to bring me back to my hotel by car,” reports Terlingen. “At four a.m. we, two American contractors, a foreign base employee and a bargirl, get into the car,” with one of the contractors complaining that they have to be at the base at 5am to report for work.¹⁷⁸ “The wild night with the American contractors was no incident,” writes Terlingen. “No less than three times a week the men go out. The clubs in Djibouti open their doors every night. In every club, there are dozens of bargirls and sex workers to be found.”¹⁷⁹

A former US contractor writing his memoirs confirmed for Terlingen that military personnel from all of the bases pay for sex with “bargirls” from the clubs. “The girls cannot be taken on the military bases,” he explains. “But they either take the girls to a hotel room they have already rented or the girls take the men to apartments.”¹⁸⁰ It has been widely known for years that French troops buy sex and drink at the clubs, before the Americans even arrived.¹⁸¹

In a *Stars and Stripes* article about US troops “adjusting” to life in Djibouti, the journalist notes, “At night, dozens of restaurants, clubs and pubs are packed with locals, U.S. and French troops and some prostitutes.”¹⁸² Even Trip Advisory reviews of hotels like the Djibouti Palace Kempinski Hotel complain of “troops with their prostitutes”¹⁸³ or “lots of soldiers and lots of prostitutes everywhere.”¹⁸⁴ Photographer Matthieu Paley describes the Sheraton and the Kempinski hotels as “prime destinations for prostitutes,” noting that most prostitutes find their clients in bars and discos and that most “are military people and workers from various nationalities.”¹⁸⁵

It is not clear if US soldiers are permitted to go to Djibouti City at night anymore, due to a curfew that was reportedly imposed after a suicide attack by al-Shabaab on one of the main restaurants in the city. However, US special forces and contractors can still go to the nightclubs, as do French personnel. The rules governing the conduct and curfews for military personnel or contractors on other bases have not yet been investigated.

Purchasing sex or engaging in behaviour that could facilitate human trafficking is forbidden for US military personnel and contractors. In April 2015, the US Department of Defense (DoD) published Instruction 2200.1 on "Combatting Trafficking in Persons," which affirms DoD's policy to "oppose prostitution, forced labor, and any related activities contributing to the phenomenon of trafficking in persons (TIP)."¹⁸⁶ The Instruction notes that "TIP is a violation of U.S. law and internationally recognized human rights, and is incompatible with DoD core values." It also affirms DoD's policy to "deter activities of DoD Service members, civilian employees, indirect hires, DoD contractors, foreign national employees of DoD, and all dependents that could facilitate or support TIP, domestically and overseas," including activities such as "prostitution, pimping, pandering, and patronizing a prostitute."¹⁸⁷

The DoD also requires all DoD employees, both military and civilian, receive training on the indicators of trafficking in persons and has developed a Strategic Plan for Combating Trafficking in Persons.¹⁸⁸ In 2012, President Obama issued an executive order on Strengthening Protections Against Trafficking in Persons In Federal Contracts, which "expressly forbids" contractors and subcontractors from engaging in human trafficking-related activities.¹⁸⁹



One of the nightlife clubs in Djibouti © Sanne Terlingen, OneWorld

But personnel are rarely held accountable, with denials running high despite the "open secrecy" about such behaviour. A CJTF-HOA spokesperson interviewed over email by Terlingen and Hooy refuted Terlingen's accounts of her experiences in the Djibouti City nightclubs. He cited General Order Number 1, the code of conduct for FRICOM and CJTF-HOA personnel (soldiers and contractors alike), which among other things allows a maximum of two alcoholic drinks per day, and prohibits personnel from paying for sex or possessing pornography, operating a motorized vehicle within eight hours of consuming alcohol, and consuming alcohol less than eight hours before work. The spokesperson claimed that "everyone" understands that violating this order has repercussions. "If incidents occur, it is our policy to address the issue immediately and hold violators accountable for their actions."¹⁹⁰ Denying that US military personnel or contractors are "misbehaving," the spokesperson argued that if the misconduct Terlingen documented was true, the legal

offices, law enforcement agency, and criminal investigation service at Camp Lemonnier would know about it.¹⁹¹

Yet, as investigative journalist Nick Turse found, crimes are rarely reported and investigations even more rarely conducted. Army investigation documents obtained by *TomDispatch* also indicate that members of the 607th Air Control Squadron and the 422nd Communications Squadron in Djibouti “committed the offense of patronizing a prostitute” at an “off-base residence” in June 2013. Turse reports that when contacted, AFRICOM “failed to respond to repeated requests for comment on or to provide further information about members of the command engaging in illicit sex.”¹⁹²

In a rare case in which soldiers were held accountable, in 2015 a US military criminal investigation found that nine out of nineteen members of the National Guard’s 775th Engineering Detachment, sent to Djibouti to help dig water wells in and around Camp Lemonnier, had sex with “prostitutes” at an off-base

residence in Djibouti and at the Samrat Hotel in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. The detachment had been warned that sex workers in the area were probably trafficked. During the investigation, one sergeant noted that several of the women were younger than his daughter.¹⁹³

In addition to failing to address the problem of military and contractor personnel facilitating trafficking and “prostitution,” the US government has also thus far failed to hold the Djiboutian government accountable for its ongoing failure to combat and prevent trafficking, sexual violence, and “prostitution”. The 2016 Trafficking in Persons report marks the first time in five years that Djibouti was downgraded to Tier 3 (the worst ranking) in the annual ranking State Department ranking. The risk of trafficking is acknowledged in previous reports, which also note that the Djiboutian government’s efforts to prevent trafficking, protect victims, or prosecute traffickers are inadequate. However, despite a failure to improve the situation, Djibouti was “upgraded” in 2017 to the “Tier 2 Watch List”. The State

Somali women walk past Djiboutian soldiers serving with AMISOM in Belet Weyne, 18 November 2012 © AU-UN IST
Photo / Stuart Price / Flickr



Department report argues that while the government did not “fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking,” it is “making significant efforts to do so” and “made key achievements during the reporting period.” Such “achievements” apparently include “increased investigations and prosecutions of trafficking cases and expanded trainings for law enforcement, prosecutorial, and judicial officials primarily on the 2016 anti-trafficking law.” However, the report acknowledges that the government failed to amend its anti-trafficking law to meet international standards, and it did not convict any traffickers. The report also notes, “the government’s identification of potential victims remains sporadic and protective services largely insufficient.”¹⁹⁴

Hannah Kooy and Sanne Terlingen, investigative journalists writing for OneWorld.nl, found between 2014 and 2015, the US State Department reports deleted references to the fact that the demand for commercial sex involving women who likely have been trafficked is sustained by the presence of foreign military personnel, which can be found in the 2013 report.¹⁹⁵ This reference was not reinstated in the 2016 report. The journalists argued that Djibouti’s continued failure for four years in a row to improve its anti-trafficking measures should have resulted in an automatic downgrade in status in the TIP reports and that the waiver it was given from 2013 to 2015 is on the basis of a plan it continued to fail to implement.¹⁹⁶

In 2011, the Committee of the Convention On the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) expressed concern with these failures as well. It recommended that Djibouti adopt a national action plan to combat trafficking, enforce the Human Trafficking Act, train law enforcement officials accordingly, establish mechanisms to identify, refer, and support

victims of trafficking, provide refugee and migrant women with access to income-generating activities to reduce their risk of engaging in survival sex, and collect sex-disaggregated data on prosecutions and convictions of traffickers.¹⁹⁷

A downgrade of status, as seen in 2016, should have had implications for the US government’s relations with Djibouti. The US “may be subject to certain restrictions on assistance, whereby the President may determine not to provide U.S. government non-humanitarian, nontrade-related foreign assistance.”¹⁹⁸ The President “may also determine to instruct the U.S. Executive Director of each multilateral development bank and the International Monetary Fund to vote against and use his or her best efforts to deny any loans or other uses of the institutions’ funds to a designated Tier 3 country for most purpose (except for humanitarian, trade-related, and certain development-related assistance).”¹⁹⁹

However, the President can also waive these restrictions if it is in the national security interests of the United States to do so.²⁰⁰ Given that Djibouti is “a very important location in terms of US interests, in terms of freedom of navigation, when it comes to power projection,”²⁰¹ it is not surprising that the downgrade did have any impact on the US rent payments to Djibouti for its military base, or that the country was upgraded again in 2017 despite persistent and significant problems.

There are a number of other bilateral arrangements that could be impacted by a downgrade, such as a partnership between the Djiboutian Armed Forces and the US National Guard; “Djibouti First,” the agreement that seeks to give preference to Djiboutian companies to win goods and services contracts at Camp Lemonnier; and USAID programmes

related to energy development, education, workforce development, health, and food security.²⁰²

When Malaysia was downgraded to Tier 3 in 2014, there were no apparent ramifications for its relationship with the US. President Obama waived sanctions against Malaysia, along with Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, and Yemen, including possible economic sanctions, arms embargoes, and travel and visa restrictions.²⁰³ In 2015, Malaysia was upgraded from Tier 3 to Tier 2, possibly so that it could be included in the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement.²⁰⁴

Sexual violence on base

As with all other foreign military bases, sexual violence is not only perpetrated against the local population or trafficked persons in Djibouti. Sexual violence within the US military is finally being recognised and acknowledged.²⁰⁵ In 2013, the documentary film *The Invisible War* revealed that a female soldier in a combat zone is more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire.²⁰⁶ In 2015, the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review panel urged the US military to take action to prevent sexual violence, ensure prosecution of offenders, and offer redress for victims.²⁰⁷ However, as the most recent DoD report has shown, 75 per cent of those who have been sexually assaulted in the military lack the confidence in the military justice system to even report the crimes against them.²⁰⁸

Camp Lemonnier is no exception. In 2011, there were at least three reported sexual assaults. Only one of the perpetrators received any punishment—a reduction in rank and a fine of half-pay for two months. In 2012, an AFRICOM senior policy advisor was sexually assaulted in a car by Maj. Gen. Ralph Baker, the commander of

a counterterrorism force in the region. They had been at a party attend by the US Ambassador Geeta Pasi. Two other military personnel, one an agent of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, were in the car at the time. Baker was given an administrative punishment, demoted in rank to brigadier general. In 2013, there were four more reported sexual assaults in Djibouti. In the fourth case, the perpetrator was charged with rape but was acquitted.²⁰⁹

Sexual violence by the Djiboutian military

Foreign militaries are not the only troops engaged in acts of sexual violence against women in Djibouti. Ten Djiboutian women living in Paris went on a hunger strike in March-April 2016, protesting the impunity of soldiers they accuse of raping them and other women in Djibouti. The Djiboutian government dismissed the allegations. Since the early 1990s, a women's advocacy group says it has recorded 246 rapes by soldiers, but that the number is probably higher due to lack of reporting, or women being turned away by doctors or lawyers when they do try to report the assaults.²¹⁰

Other forms of gender-based violence

Djibouti ratified CEDAW in 1998. This treaty calls on countries to “condemn violence against women, to create legal and social protection and not to invoke custom, tradition or religion to avoid taking protective and preventative measures.”²¹¹ It has not, however, ratified the CEDAW Optional Protocol, which allows the CEDAW Committee to receive and consider complaints from individuals or groups within its jurisdiction.²¹² In 2005, Djibouti also ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in

Africa (Maputo Protocol), which “guarantees comprehensive rights to women including the right to take part in the political process, to social and political equality with men, improved autonomy in their reproductive health decisions, and an end to female genital mutilation.”²¹³ In 2008, the government created a Ministry for the promotion of women, family, and social affairs; in 2007 it established a centre to provide support to women who are victims of violence.

However, Africa for Women’s Rights has found that discrimination of women persists throughout the country, including in many laws. Marriage is only valid with the consent of the two spouses and the woman’s guardian, and requires a dowry. The legal age of marriage is 18 years old, though guardians can marry off younger people. The Family Code of 2002 specifies that “the wife must respect the prerogatives of the husband, as head of the family, and owes him obedience in the interest of the family. The husband and wife must fulfil their marital duties, in conformity with practice and custom.” Polygamy is authorised by the Code, and there are time restrictions on remarriage of women who are divorced or widows.²¹⁴

The CEDAW Committee has recommended that Djibouti amend its Code to strengthen women’s rights in relation to marriage and divorce and is concerned the government argues these cannot be changed because they are rooted in “socio-cultural and religious values”. It also expressed concern “that disputes concerning violations of women’s rights, especially cases of sexual violence, are often settled through traditional justice mechanisms, such as payment of a symbolic amount to the victim’s family without consulting or compensating the victim.”²¹⁵ The Committee’s concerns extended to a variety of “adverse cultural norms, practices and traditions as well as patriarchal attitudes and

deep-rooted stereotypes,” which perpetuate discrimination and violence against women. The prevalence of female genital mutilation is 93 per cent even though it is illegal under the criminal code, and the majority of cases go unreported, unprosecuted, and unpunished.²¹⁶

Both the CEDAW Committee and UNICEF have reported that Djibouti has engaged in efforts to eliminate gender disparity in primary education. However, UNICEF notes, “girls still represent a minority of first-year enrolments in basic education (45 per cent). One of the main barriers to access to education is still the high cost of school books, which leads families to spend more on boys than on girls.”²¹⁷

Freedom of assembly, speech, and political dissent

Freedom House reports that freedom of assembly and association are nominally protected in the constitution but are often not respected in practice.²¹⁸ In 2011, the government suppressed Arab Spring-like protests, and in December 2015, police clashed with the opposition, killing at least seven and wounding dozens.²¹⁹ A Djiboutian opposition group reported that at least 19 people were killed. The State Department condemned the violence and urged the government to “exercise restraint”.²²⁰

In 2013, more than 500 opposition figures were arrested for participating in protests following legislative elections.²²¹ The opposition continues to protest against vote-rigging and harassment and complains regularly of illegal security crackdowns and the impossibility of free and fair elections. “There’s a lack of freedom, people are desperate, poor—it creates a lot of discontent,” says Daher Ahmed Farah, spokesman for the opposition group Union for the National Salvation.²²²

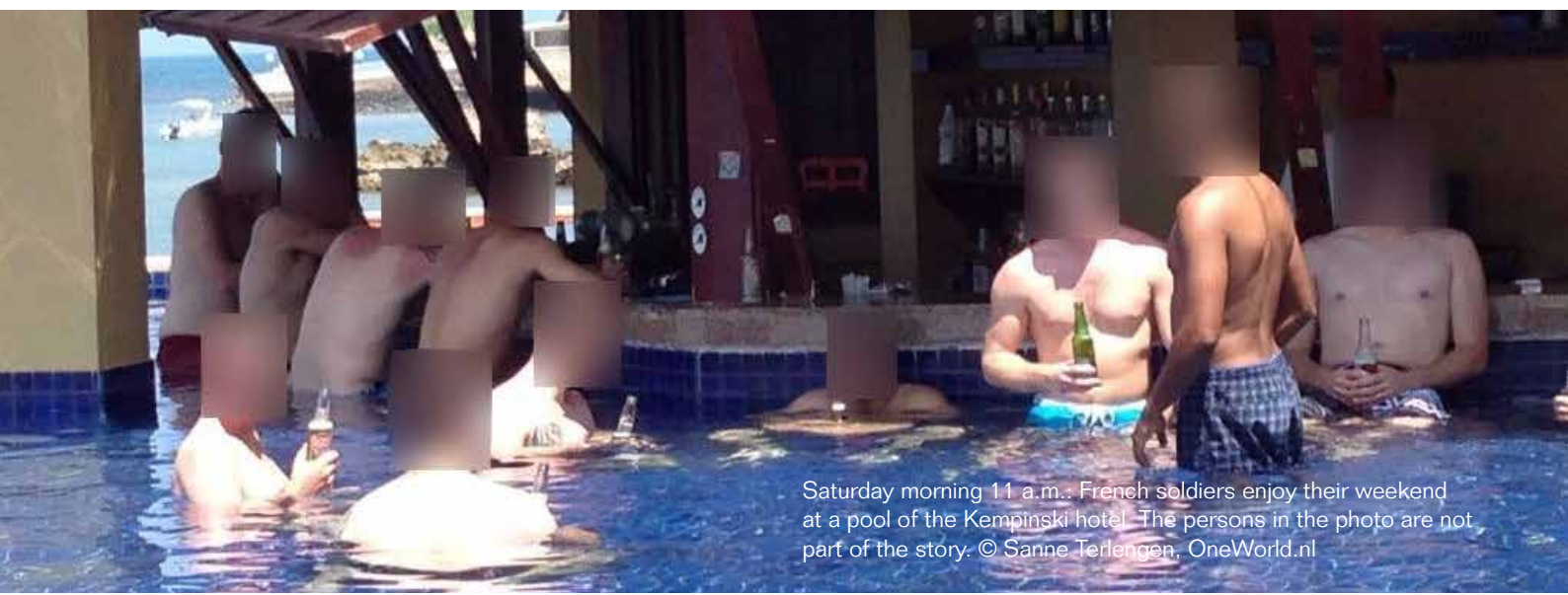
In its Human Rights Report, the US State Department also critiques the Djiboutian government for monitoring communications of its critics and keeping their homes under surveillance. "The government monitored digital communications intended to be private and punished their authors.... The government monitored social networks to ensure there were no planned demonstrations or overly critical views of the government. Djibouti Telecom, the state-owned internet provider, reportedly continued to block access to the websites of the *Association for Respect of Human Rights in Djibouti* and *La Voix de Djibouti*, which often criticized the government."²²³

At the same time, however, the US relies on Djiboutian intelligence for information. According to a cable released by Wikileaks, the US embassy commended the Djiboutian intelligence service, claiming, "They have demonstrated the capability to deter terrorism and have been successful in intercepting and turning over suspected terrorists to U.S. authorities.... the National Security Service has been extremely cooperative with Embassy requests; what they lack in experience they make up for in cooperation. The Embassy enjoys a strong relationship."²²⁴

Djibouti's main newspaper and broadcaster are both owned by the government. The

opposition newspaper closed in 2007 for publishing an article about bribery of the President's brother-in-law, who is the governor of the Central Bank of Djibouti. Freedom House reports that the official media practices self-censorship and does not criticise the government. "Journalists generally avoid covering sensitive issues, including human rights."²²⁵ It also notes that the US military presence in Djibouti "creates additional pressure to self-censor, as journalists are discouraged from reporting on soldiers' activities."²²⁶

This hasn't gone unnoticed by opposition leaders. "Have we become an aircraft carrier?" questions Farah Abdillahi Miguil, chair of the Djibouti Human Rights League. "This huge military presence hasn't translated to something positive on issues like democracy."²²⁷ Activists and journalists have long critiqued the military build-up in Djibouti. Abayomi Azikiwe, the editor of Pan-African News Wire, argues there's more at play than terrorism. "More and more oil is being imported there from Africa into the United States, as well as other strategic minerals," Azikiwe said in an interview with *AfricanGlobe*. "That, in our opinion, is guiding this increased military presence." Some critics, such as professor Ben Fred-Mensah, have questioned whether or not their country has retained its sovereignty amidst the increasing presence of foreign militaries.²²⁸



Saturday morning 11 a.m.: French soldiers enjoy their weekend at a pool of the Kempinski hotel. The persons in the photo are not part of the story. © Sanne Terlengen, OneWorld.nl

Conclusion and recommendations

Each of the issues addressed in this report require considerable further investigation and analysis in order to develop an integrated strategy to effectively confront the violations of human rights and the increasing militarisation of Djibouti and the region. Human rights violations in Djibouti and the region are linked to existing conflicts in the Horn of Africa and Middle East, which are exacerbated by the militarisation of Djibouti. The launching of drone strikes and other military operations from Djibouti have increased neighbouring violence and contributed to massive refugee and migrant flows. The resulting human rights violations are highly gendered and inimical to even the possibility of peace in the region and beyond.

The following recommendations are meant to delineate an approach that should be adopted. These recommendations are based on WILPF's and other women's rights groups' considerable experience addressing similar issues in countries where militarisation and attendant violations of rights have been exposed.

1. History has shown that foreign military bases, regardless of the nature of their operations, undermine human rights, increase geopolitical tensions, perpetuate war, and facilitate sexual violence. In Djibouti, the symbiotic economic and political relationship between the foreign governments operating there and the Djiboutian government seems to be a deterrent to any of the governments involved to confront the human rights abuses by their own soldiers or by their host government. The demilitarisation of Djibouti is an imperative. Instead of establishing and maintaining military bases, the international

community should ensure economic and other support to address the chronic human rights situation in the country..

2. In the meantime, all states carry with them extraterritorial obligations in relation to their militaries or other presence in a third country. States with military operations in Djibouti must use their influence with the Djiboutian government to ensure respect for human rights.

3. The US has specific rules and regulations for the conduct of its military personnel and contractors operating abroad. However, human rights violations committed by both largely go unreported and unprosecuted. There must be credible and effective mechanisms for reporting and prosecuting sexual violence (of other military personnel and of women locally), purchasing of sex, and facilitation of trafficking. All states that have a military presence in Djibouti must:

- Ensure training so that all troops are aware of the crimes related to having sex with a trafficked person and in all cases of sex with minors;
- Ensure real investigation and accountability mechanisms are in place; and
- Place all civilian contractors under the same regulations as military personnel through status of forces agreements.

4. International organisations and civil society groups must conduct research into the laws and prosecutions involving other governments' military and contracting personnel, including investigations into the companies contracted by all of the military bases in Djibouti; the numbers and sex of workers employed by these

companies; the conduct of military personnel and contractors employed at the military bases; and the restrictions placed upon them by their home governments and mechanisms to hold them to account for violations of these laws.

5. States operating militarily in Djibouti must desist from any activity that facilitates the commission of war crimes or violations of international humanitarian law or human rights law in Yemen, Somalia, or elsewhere.

6. All states, including states parties and signatories to the Arms Trade Treaty, must cease arms transfers to Djibouti, including equipment that can be used to facilitate gender-based violence, carry out surveillance against human rights defenders, and oppress human rights. States should undertake measures to prevent the illicit trafficking of weapons through Djibouti, including off its coast.

7. The peoples from states in the region will continue to flee unless and until the root causes of forced displacement are addressed, including armed conflict, poverty, and environmental degradation. States, through the multilateral system, should develop a strategic and integrated plan for the region based on the realisation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) as an alternative to militarised security policies.

8. At least until they have withdrawn, all countries with a military presence, and their contractors, should make substantial financial contributions, to designated international organisations, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Population Fund, and UN Children's Fund, in order to:

- Improve rapid and effective registration of migrants and refugees crossing the border into Djibouti and provide adequate reception facilities

that take into account the gendered dimensions of displacement;

- Provide information to migrants and refugees as to legal status and options, and advise them as to the extent of trafficking and the risk of forced labour in Djibouti;
- Improve the conditions in the refugee camps in Djibouti and create a safe space for women and children, including by considering alternative places to Ali Addeh, which is already compromised;
- Vastly improve recruitment and training of staff for the refugee camp(s) and ensure accountability mechanisms for staff behaviour;
- Develop a strategy for ensuring the camps are as safe as possible, that gender analysis is conducted and responded to, and that there is refugee participation in the way it is run;
- End the repatriation of migrant children deemed to have broken the law and provide services for them; and
- Decriminalise prostitution, which is enabling the state to persecute those forced into the sex industry with no legal or other protections.



Djibouti nightlife, 11 August 2013 © Oliver Roux / Flickr

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