

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 7, 2018

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable James Mattis  
Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Mattis,

We write to express concern about Djibouti's recent nationalization of the Doraleh Container Terminal and the possibility that this development will allow China to expand its influence and challenge U.S. interests in the Horn of Africa.

In February 2018, the Government of Djibouti terminated a concession contract for the Doraleh Container Terminal with DP World, a United Arab Emirates-based company and the fourth largest port operator in the world. In September, it nationalized the port, citing "emergency" measures, and ignored legal rulings in the United Kingdom intended to restrain the termination of the joint venture and nationalization of Doraleh.

Even more alarming are reports that the government will likely cede operations of Doraleh to Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs), following a July 2018 agreement between the Djiboutian government and a Chinese SOE to establish a large free trade zone in Djibouti. Troublingly, Djibouti's external debt has grown from 50 to 85 percent of GDP in only two years, much of which is owed to the Export-Import Bank of China.

We believe these developments provide major strategic benefits to China and risk undermining the balance of power in East Africa and around the Bab al-Mandeb strait, a major artery of maritime trade between Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. China's control of Doraleh could allow it to impede U.S. military operations in the Horn of Africa, as well as those of U.S. allies like Italy, Japan, and France, which maintain military bases in the region. These facilities are

vital to ensuring the free flow of maritime commerce and the success of counterterrorism and intelligence operations against extremist groups like al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and al-Shabab.

Furthermore, control of Doraleh will allow China to expand its influence in East Africa. For example, Ethiopia currently relies on Djibouti for more than 95 percent of its imports. Chinese control of both Doraleh and the new Doraleh Multi-Purpose Port would allow it to exert greater control over Ethiopia's economy and expand its political influence in a country of more than 100 million that is a linchpin of stability in the region.

We respectfully ask you to outline in writing the military and political consequences of China gaining full control of Doraleh Container Terminal, as well as to share our diplomatic and security strategy for countering Chinese influence in Djibouti and throughout the Horn of Africa. We stand ready to work with you to counter growing Chinese influence and protect U.S. interests in the Horn of Africa and throughout the continent.

Sincerely,



Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



Marco Rubio  
United States Senator