



# **International Boundary Study**

**No. 89 – May 1, 1969**

## **Afghanistan – China Boundary**

**(Country Codes: AF-CH)**

**The Geographer  
Office of the Geographer  
Bureau of Intelligence and Research**

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# AFGHANISTAN–CHINA BOUNDARY

## I. BACKGROUND

The international boundary between Afghanistan and China extends for 47 miles along the water divide between the Aksu (Agsu) River to the west and the Karachukur Su to the east. The former stream is a tributary of the Amu Darya (Oxus) while the latter belongs to the Yarkand (Yeh-ehr Ch'iang Ho) system. Both principal rivers flow into the Central Asian region of internal drainage.

The boundary traverses a high ridge of the Mustagh Range (elevations range between 16,000 and 18,500 feet) to the west of the Taghdumbash Pamir. The extremely isolated frontier serves as a wild and mountainous buffer between Central and Southern Asia. Sparsely populated, the frontier possesses limited economic potential although it continues to have a great strategic value.

In the late 19th century, British authorities in India feared the encroachment of an expansionist Czarist Russia into Central Asia, Sinkiang, and Tibet. The British sought and obtained a buffer between Russia and India by the extension of Afghan sovereignty over the narrow Wakhan valley. This east–west corridor effectively served to mark the limits of British and Russian political expansion. While the boundary between the Wakhan Corridor and Russia was carefully delimited and eventually demarcated, the eastern limit of Afghan sovereignty—the boundary with China—remained an undelimited, "conventional" line on maps. The Chinese in the early 20th century, however, advanced claims to much of the Pamir Region including most of the Afghan corridor as well as a sizable portion of adjacent Russian Tadzhikistan; the Sino–Russian boundary had not been delimited south of the Kizil Jik Dawan.<sup>1</sup>

Within the last decade, the Chinese communist regime has undertaken a program of boundary delimitation and rectification with its smaller neighboring states. Treaties have been negotiated with Nepal, Burma, Pakistan, and Mongolia.<sup>2</sup> The Afghanistan–China boundary agreement, signed on November 22, 1963, was the fifth of these boundaries treaties initiated by the Chinese communists.

## II. TREATY AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ACTS

Afghanistan and China announced on March 2, 1963, their intention to negotiate the formal delimitation of "the boundary existing between the two countries." Without ever stating it, the two countries considered only the alignment of the "conventional" line between them.

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<sup>1</sup> See International Boundary Study No. 64, February 14, 1966: China–U.S.S.R. Boundary.

<sup>2</sup> See International Boundary Study No. 42, November 30, 1964: Burma–China Boundary; No. 50, May 30, 1965: China–Nepal Boundary; and No. 85, November 15, 1968: China–Pakistan Boundary.

Following negotiations begun in Kabul in late 1963, the present boundary treaty was signed.

A. Boundary Agreement between the Royal Afghan Government and the Peoples Republic of China signed on November 22, 1963, in Peking (Official Gazette of Afghanistan, No. 4, May 7, 1966.)

The full text of the treaty is as follows:

The Chairman of the CPR and His Majesty the King of Afghanistan;

With a view of insuring the further development of the friendly and good neighborly relations which happily exist between the two independent and sovereign states, China and Afghanistan;

Resolving to delimit and demarcate formally the boundary existing between China and Afghanistan in the Pamirs in accordance with the principles of respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity and mutual nonaggression and the Ten Principles of the Bandung Conference, and in the spirit of friendship, cooperation, and mutual understanding;

Firmly believing that the formal delimitation and demarcation of the boundary between the two countries will further strengthen the peace and security of this region;

Have decided for this purpose to conclude the present treaty, and appointed as their respective plenipotentiaries;

For the Chairman of the CPR: Chen I, Minister of Foreign Affairs;

For His Majesty the King of Afghanistan: Al-Qayyum, Minister of the Interior;

Who, having examined each other's full powers and found them to be in good and due form, have agreed upon the following:

Article 1. The contracting parties agree that starting from a peak with a height of 5,630 meters—the reference coordinates of which are approximately 37 degrees 03 minutes north, 74 degrees 36 minutes

east—in the southern extremity, the boundary line between the two countries runs along the Mustagh Range water divide between the Karachukur Su River, a tributary of Tashkurghan River, on the one hand, and the sources of the Aksu River and the Wakhjir River, the upper reaches of the Wakhan River, on the other hand, passing through South Wakhjir Daban (called Wakhjir Pass on the Afghan map) at the elevation of 4,923 meters, North Wakhjir Daban (named on the Chinese map only), West Koktorok Daban (named on the Chinese map only), East Koktorok Daban (called Kara Jilga Pass on the Afghan map), Tok Man Su Daban called Mihman Yoli Pass on the Afghan map), Sirik Tash Daban (named on the

Chinese map only), Kokrash Kol Daban (called Tigarman Su Pass on the Afghan map) and reaches Peak Kokrash Kol (called Peak Povalo Shveikovski on the Afghan map) with a height of 5,698 meters.

The entire boundary line as described in the present article is shown on the 1:200,000 scale map of the Chinese side in Chinese and the 1:253,440 scale map of the Afghan side in Persian, which are attached to the present treaty. Both of the above-mentioned maps have English words as an auxiliary.

Article 2. The contracting parties agree that wherever the boundary between the two countries follows a water divide, the ridge thereof shall be the boundary line, and wherever it passes through a daban—pass—the water-parting line thereof shall be the boundary line.

Article 3. The contracting parties agree that:

1—As soon as the present treaty comes into force a Chinese–Afghan joint boundary demarcation commission composed of an equal number of representatives and several advisers from each side shall be set up to carry out on location concrete surveys of the boundary between the two countries and to erect boundary markers in accordance with the provisions of Article 1 of the present treaty and then draft a protocol relating to the boundary between the two countries and prepare boundary maps setting forth in detail the alignment of the boundary line and the location of the boundary markers on the ground.

2—The protocol and the boundary maps mentioned in paragraph one of the present article, upon coming into force after being signed by the representatives of the two governments, shall become annexes to the present treaty, and the boundary maps prepared by the joint boundary demarcation commission shall replace the maps attached to the present treaty.

3—Upon the signing of the above-mentioned protocol and boundary maps, the tasks of the Chinese–Afghan joint boundary demarcation commission shall be terminated.

Article 4. The contracting parties agree that any dispute concerning the boundary which may arise after the formal delimitation of the boundary between the two countries shall be settled by the two parties through friendly consultation.

Article 5. The present treaty shall come into force on the day of its signature.

Done in duplicate in Peking on 22 November 1963, in the Chinese, Persian, and English languages, all three texts being equally authentic.

(Signed)      Chen I, plenipotentiary of the CPR.

(Signed)      Al-Qayyum, plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Afghanistan.

The attaching to the treaty by Afghanistan and China of differing maps has been typical of the boundary treaties negotiated by the Chinese communists. Most of the boundary areas are isolated and poorly mapped and problems developed over precise positioning of features. The commission for the demarcation of the boundary, established by Article 3, was directed to prepare a new map. This map, or series of maps, has been annexed to the detailed demarcation Protocol of the treaty signed in Kabul on March 24, 1965. These maps, however, have not been published.

### **III. SUMMARY**

The precise positioning of the boundary remains in question although it obviously has been established to the satisfaction of both governments. As a result, the Afghanistan–China boundary should be shown on official U.S. maps as an established international boundary. Because of the lack of specific detail, however, the disclaimer<sup>3</sup> should be used on all maps showing the specific boundary. The problem also exists that the geographic coordinates given in the treaty for the initial point of the boundary—37°03' North, 74°36' East—do not conform with the same point in the China–Pakistan agreement. The problem obviously is related directly to the poor quality of mapping in the frontier.

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<sup>3</sup> Representation of international boundaries is not necessarily authoritative.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by the Geographer, Office of Strategic and Functional Research, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16.

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