

China, Tajikistan Sign Border Agreement

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BEIJING — China hailed a new border treaty with Tajikistan on Thursday, praising the resolution of a dispute that dates to the 19th century.

Tajik leaders have also trumpeted the treaty, saying they ceded far less land than China had wanted. On Wednesday, the parliament voted to turn over 1,000 square kilometers of territory in the sparsely populated Pamir Mountains region. There was no immediate information on how many people live in the territory.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei confirmed on Thursday that the neighbors had signed a treaty, "thus thoroughly resolving the boundary issue left over from history."

Hong gave no further details.

The dispute dates to the 19th century, when Tajikistan was part of tsarist Russia. Tajikistan's foreign minister, Khamrokon Zarifi, said China had initially claimed more than 28,000 square kilometers. But opposition leader Mukhiddin Kabiri called the land transfer unconstitutional and said it represents a defeat for Tajik diplomacy.

The deal to cede the land was drawn up in 2002, when Tajikistan and China agreed to the revised border.

Sukhrob Sharipov, head of Tajikistan's government-affiliated Center for Strategic Studies, said Thursday that the deal would ensure the inviolability of the country's borders for decades to come.

Tajikistan risked suffering much greater territorial losses in its recent past, he said.

"After the collapse of Soviet Union, Tajikistan was on the verge of collapse — China could easily have snatched the whole of [the eastern Badakhshan province], and nobody would have even made a sound," he said.

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