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GEOGRAPHIC MEMORANDUM

POSSIBLE CHINESE COMMUNIST CLAIMS  
TO THE WAKHAN CORRIDOR OF AFGHANISTAN

CIA/RR G/I 59-45

September 1959

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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W A R N I N G

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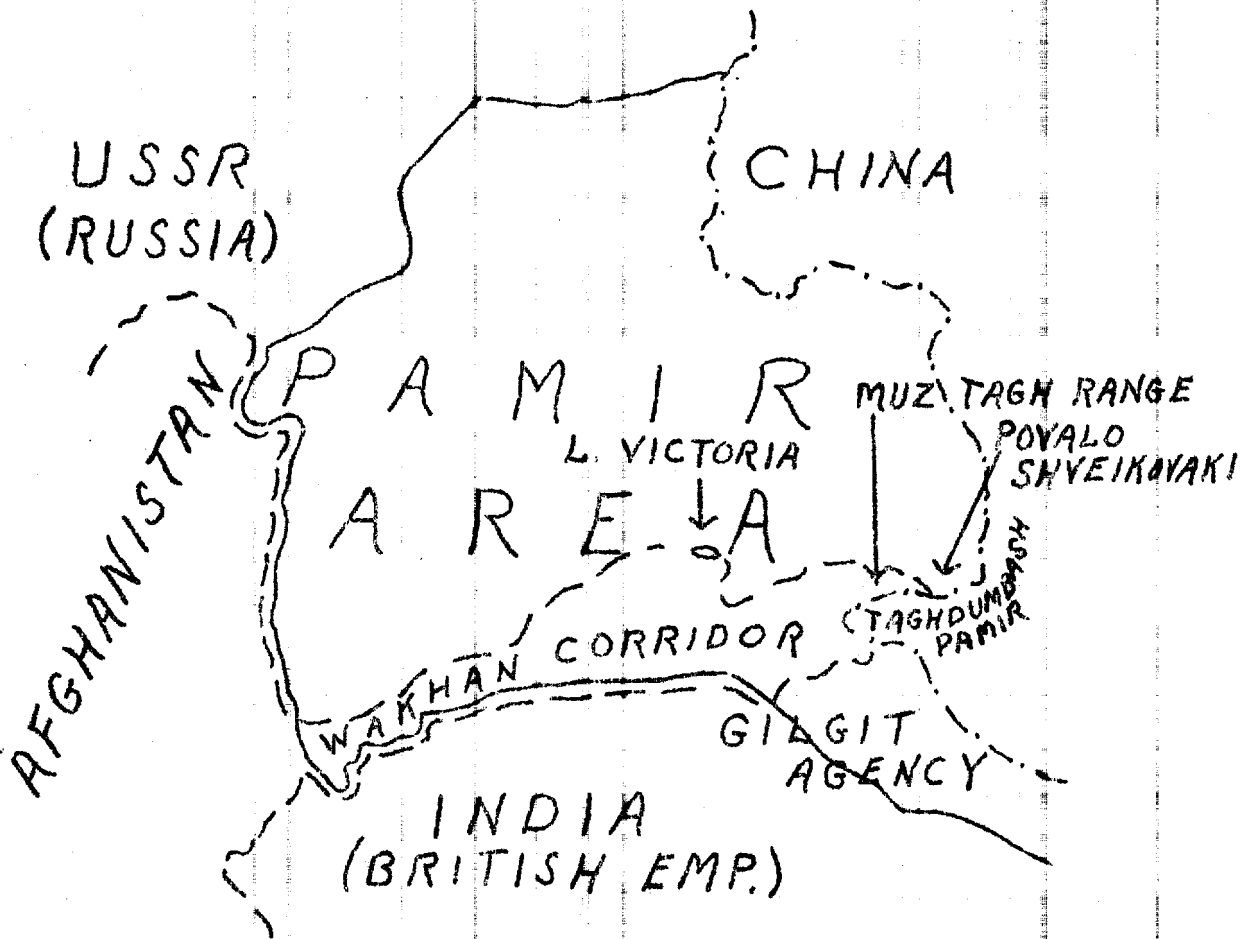
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POSSIBLE CHINESE COMMUNIST CLAIMS  
TO THE WAKHAN CORRIDOR OF AFGHANISTAN

I. Historical Background

The Chinese claim to the Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan dates from the beginning of the Manchu Dynasty (1644-1911), if not earlier. Well before the empires of Russia and Great Britain spread into this part of Asia, the Chinese regarded the Wakhan Corridor as an integral part of the Pamir area that formed their extreme southwestern frontier. By the latter part of the 19th Century, Chinese claims in the Pamir area were being challenged. The actual partition of the Wakhan Corridor portion of the Pamirs was accomplished by Russia and Great Britain between 1872 and 1895. The Chinese were powerless to stop the partition, although they made a limited effort to do so in 1891.

The western part of the Wakhan Corridor was incorporated into Afghanistan by the Clarendon-Mortchskoff Agreement of 1872-73. This agreement established, among other things, the northern boundary of the Wakhan Corridor as far east as Lake Victoria. The intention of the British Government was to establish an Afghan buffer strip of territory between Russia and India. (See accompanying map.)



- MAXIMUM CHINESE BOUNDARY, PRE-JUNE 1953
- - - POST 1953 CHINESE BOUNDARY
- - - CURRENT BOUNDARIES OTHER THAN CHINESE

In 1891, the Russians began to move eastward beyond Lake Victoria, a move which threatened to give Russia and India a common boundary. The Russian move was countered by the Government of India, which persuaded the Afghan ruler, Abdur Rahman, to exercise active control over the Wakhan Corridor; at the same time the British Government took up with Russia and China the question of extending the Russia-Afghanistan boundary eastwards from Lake Victoria to the Chinese frontier. Thereafter the British spent two years (1893-95) trying in vain to persuade the Chinese Government to participate in negotiations concerning the frontier. The negotiations with the Russians, however, brought results.

The eastern part of the Wakhan Corridor was incorporated into Afghanistan by the 11 March 1895 Agreement between Russia and Great Britain. This Agreement defined the Russia-Afghanistan boundary between Lake Victoria and the Chinese frontier; the boundary was demarcated the same year. Inasmuch as the southern part of the Wakhan Corridor boundary between Afghanistan and India had been fixed, only the short China-Afghanistan boundary at the eastern end of the Wakhan Corridor remained unagreed upon.

The China-Afghanistan boundary was unilaterally settled by the British, who drew the boundary line along the crest of the Muz Tagh Range, which divided the Taghdumbash Pamir of China from the Wakhan Corridor. The boundary, as determined, ran from the easternmost point on the Russia-Afghanistan boundary, Kowalo Suvetikovaki, to an undefined point on the boundary between Gilgit Agency (British India -- now Pakistan controlled) and Afghanistan.

## II. Chinese Diplomatic Policy

Examination of Chinese diplomatic policy reveals that all Chinese Governments since the Manchu Dynasty have laid claim to the Pamir-Wakhan Corridor area. The problem now centers on whether these claims are still in force. The evidence available suggests that no change of policy took place before 1953. No document is available to indicate any abandonment of the claim since 1953.

## III. Chinese Cartographic Policy

In 1953, the Chinese Communists, who heretofore had followed the claims of the Chinese Nationalists in the Pamir-Wakhan Corridor area, began to print maps that did not show the historic claim. Chinese Communist cartographers began for the first time to represent the existing situation in which the USSR controlled the major part of the Pamir area and the Afghans and Chinese minor parts. After 1953 the Wakhan Corridor is shown as belonging to Afghanistan.

What prompted the change in Chinese Communist cartographic policy?

There are three possibilities:

- (1) In standardizing their cartographic program, the Chinese Communists decided to show the de facto boundary situation.
- (2) Chinese Communists were reacting to Soviet sensitivity about having USSR territory claimed by a Communist ally.
- (3) Chinese Communists maps were reflecting the existence of a secret document unavailable to the West that had ceded the Pamirs (excluding the Wakhan Corridor) to the USSR.



IV. Evaluation of Material for Propaganda Use

Although the Chinese Communist maps no longer show the Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan as part of China, this does not necessarily indicate abandonment of the historic Chinese claim; it may merely be postponed until a more favorable occasion arrives. The Chinese seldom abandon a claim to territory; maps with different boundaries can be made on short notice.

The effective use of this textual material therefore hinges upon future events. If the Chinese Communist continue to press their claims to areas along the border with India, the Afghans might be inclined to give weight to any document showing a Chinese claim to the Wakhan Corridor. In such circumstances the Afghans would be realistic in not caring about the possible reasons for the change in Chinese Communist portrayal of the boundary. The actual Afghan possession of a pre-1953 Chinese Communist map showing the Wakhan Corridor as a part of China might well alert the Afghans to the possible renewal of Chinese boundary claims.

On the other hand, if the Chinese Communists do not continue to press their claim to territory along the Indian border, the use of pre-1953 Chinese Communist maps might not serve the purpose of alerting the Afghans and could actually be dangerous. The Chinese, by providing post-1953 maps not showing the claim to the Wakhan Corridor, could present evidence that their policy had changed. Another school of thought claims that Afghan Government officials sometimes have great difficulty in reading

a map, and would not note the date of publication. Although strong historical evidence supports this point, it is much less true today than in the past.

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