

EYE ON AFGHANISTAN, CHINA TO BUILD MILITARY BASE IN TAJIKISTAN

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China will take full control of a military base in Tajikistan near the Afghan border that it has been quietly operating and will also build a new base for the Tajik Government, according to a report on Thursday.

Tajikistan on Wednesday granted approval for the construction of a new base, following an agreement reached between Tajikistan's Interior Ministry and China's Public Security Ministry or police force, the U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe (RFE) reported. That the agreement was being signed by the Public Security Ministry, and not the Chinese military, suggests a focus on counterterrorism amid rising concerns over instability in neighbouring Afghanistan. The new base, RFE quoted Tajik officials as saying, would be owned by Tajikistan's Rapid Reaction Group or special forces, and financed by China for a cost of \$10 million. It will be located in the eastern Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous province near the Pamir mountains, and Chinese troops will not be stationed there.

While this base will be under Tajik control, the Tajikistan Government has also agreed to transfer full control of an existing facility that both sides have been using jointly, a former Soviet base not far from the China-Tajikistan-Afghanistan tri-junction and the Wakhan Corridor, where China shares a less than 100 km border with Afghanistan.

Russia and India are among countries that already have a military presence in bases in Tajikistan. China and Tajikistan have, however, continued to officially deny the presence of Chinese security forces there.

However, a communique from China's Embassy in Dushanbe to Tajikistan's Foreign Ministry, seen by RFE, said the Tajik Government offered to transfer full control in exchange for military aid from China. That base too is thought to be staffed not by the Chinese military but by China's People's Armed Police Force, which is responsible for internal security in Xinjiang. China's interest in the base is tied to its security concerns in its western Xinjiang region, which shares a border with Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The base, once full control has been transferred, will become only the second known overseas Chinese security facility, after Djibouti near the Horn of Africa .

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