UPRISING AND CRACKDOWN

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Tibetan protesters during the wave of protests in Tibet in 2008

Since President Xi Jinping's assumption of leadership on March 13, 2013, the crackdown across Tibet has deepened, particularly in areas where there have been self-immolations or unrest. Policies and measures that undermine Tibetan culture and religion that led to the protests and unrest in the first place have been strengthened, while the 'unbearable oppression' cited by a number of self-immolators in their last statements has been intensified. [1]

In 2008, there were protests all over Tibet. The protest by the nomads and monks of Amchok Bora in eastern Tibet is one of the defining images of the demonstrations that swept across the Tibetan plateau in 2008. [2] In the months immediately following March 2008, one or more protests have been reported in at least 52 county-level locations in Tibetan areas of China, [3]

as well as in Chengdu (the capital of Sichuan Province), Lanzhou (the capital of Gansu Province), and Beijing, where Tibetan students held a silent vigil for those harmed or killed in the crackdown.

A new cycle of protests was sparked by the repression that followed March 2008 and by the implementation of an intensified 'patriotic education' campaign requiring pledges of allegiance to the Chinese government and the denunciation of the Dalai Lama. [4]

The Spring 2008 demonstrations and the continued dissent reveal fundamental flaws in the central government's Tibet policy. Beijing has had decades of unfettered control in Tibet to deliver good governance compatible with the cultural priorities of the Tibetan people. By any measure, it has failed. While Beijing abandoned its Cultural Revolution era

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[1] *The crackdown in Tibet under Xi: the March anniversaries and Tibetan New Year as Xi Jinping marks a year in power*, ICT, March 18, 2014. http://www.savetibet.org/the-crackdown-in-tibet-under-xi-the-march-anniversaries-and-tibetan-new-year-as-xi-jinping-marks-a-year-in-power/#sthash.s8V7c59s.dpuf

[2] See Youtube video available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxnvOYAlkUA

[3] *Protests Fueled by Patriotic Education Continue Amidst Lockdowns*, Congressional-Executive Commission on China report, April 10, 2008 http://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/CECCAnalyses-RecentTibetProtest.pdf

[4] *ibid*

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approach in most of China, in Tibet it has instituted new hardline policies that target the Tibetan Buddhist identity and its most visible leaders; patriotic education has become the tool of the Chinese propagandist, the Tibetan language has been downgraded in usage and replaced with Mandarin Chinese, and there is an increasing influx of Chinese migrants, further marginalizing the Tibetan population—all of this done in the absence of safeguards that would protect traditional Tibetan livelihoods and the fragile environment.

The take-away message from the Tibetan protests was: The Dalai Lama, and not the Chinese state, represents Tibetan interests.

The Chinese government's response has been a massive troop deployment across the Tibetan plateau. Monks and nuns were the primary targets and monasteries were swiftly sealed and encircled by armed soldiers. Thousands of Tibetans from all walks of life have simply disappeared. Less than six months from the initial uprising, someone had disappeared from almost every Tibetan household in Lhasa, where people were still sleeping in their clothes a year later, fearful of a knock on the door in the middle of the night. The Chinese authorities have begun punishing Tibetan intellectuals and artists, who—despite the risks—have been vocal in their expressions of Tibetan identity.

Yet, in the more than 125 protests across the Tibetan plateau since March 10, 2008 only the outburst on March 14 in Lhasa appears to have escalated to serious violence and to have caused innocent deaths. It is important to note that there has not been any credible investigation into what led to this violence or who was responsible. Certainly, there were other incidents that resulted in damage to private property and targeted police stations or other symbols of the government's presence in Tibet. For example, it appears that thousands of Chinese flags were ripped down from poles and destroyed. There are no reliable numbers from official or other sources for Tibetans or police and other security personnel injured or killed in the protests.

In 2013 there were crackdowns in Driru (Chinese: Biru), Nagchu prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and protests by local Tibetans at the detentions of a monk and young writer.[5]

In the weeks and months following these events, the Chinese government sealed off much of Tibet from the outside world. Only a trickle of foreign journalists and tourists were permitted inside until after the conclusion of August 2008's Beijing Olympics and a series of sensitive anniversaries—including the 50th anniversary of the failed March 10, 1959 uprising and the 50th anniversary of Chinese rule in Tibet, which the Chinese government commemorated with 'Serf Emancipation Day' on March 28, 2009. Near these sensitive dates, the Chinese government launched a 'strike hard campaign,' stationing approximately 700,000 People's Armed Police in Tibet to keep order. However, Tibetans continued their protests, with more passive resistance including a farming boycott and a campaign to not celebrate Losar (Tibetan New Year) in order to mourn for Tibetans killed during the 2008 demonstrations and crackdown.

The international community has an important role to play in ensuring that the Chinese government provides a full accounting of the Spring 2008 events and their consequences, and moves forward in a substantive, meaningful dialogue with the only legitimate representative of the Tibetan people, the Dalai Lama. Tibetans have put their lives on the line for nothing less than that.

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[5] *Four Tibetans Shot Dead as Protests Spread in Driru County*, RFA, October 11, 2013. Quoted in: http://www.savetibet.org/new-images-of-deepening-crackdown-in-nagchu-tibet/#sthash.tCCtrcWo.dpuf