

SELF-IMMOLATIONS IN TIBET

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Executive Summary

1. From 16 March 2011 to 19 June 2013, 117 confirmed self-immolations cases by Tibetans in China were reported. Young Tibetans mostly below age 30 who set themselves on fire to express their anguish over perceived China's oppressive actions against Tibetans' religion and culture, and their desire for the return of the Dalai Lama, have created an image problem for China.
2. Chinese officials have described the self-immolators as outcasts, terrorists, criminals and mentally ill people, branded their acts of self-immolation as "suicide terrorism," and held the Dalai Lama and his supporters among exiled Tibetans responsible for encouraging this and other forms of protests to separate Tibet from China.
3. The original epicenter of the self-immolations was in western Sichuan, southern Gansu and Qinghai where sizeable pockets of Tibetan live; this was probably because Tibetans in particularly Ngaba (Aba) and Kardze (Ganzi) autonomous prefectures in western Sichuan have tried to maintain their Tibetan identity, as they live so close to, and even amidst, the Han Chinese.
4. The self-immolations constitute the biggest aftershocks of the 2008 anti-Chinese riots in Tibet and caught the Chinese government off-guard. To the Tibetans, the tightening of security and constructing more military camps in Tibetan-populated areas after the riots only deepened local resentment and alienation.
5. The Chinese government launched a new surveillance system in Lhasa in April 2012 that divides the city into grids of five or 10 households, each monitored by a leader and patrolled by volunteers on the lookout for trouble makers.
6. The Tibetan self-immolations have so far failed to bring changes as security cordons have kept journalists out; internet and mobile phone services

suspensions have prevented the spread of self-immolation news and images; and most Chinese have little sympathy for their appeals as they accept the government's position that Tibetan protesters want to split Tibet from China.

7. Beijing has no wish to negotiate with the Dalai Lama or his people on power sharing and control of Tibet. Rather, the Chinese government has started to jail Tibetans for planning or abetting the fiery protests. Meanwhile, the fiery protests have shown no sign of abating.