

Halting Mining Operations In Zatoe

SUMMARY

In 2014, residents of Zatoe County in eastern Tibet succeeded in halting all mining activities in their region and getting the area designated as protected. Their campaign had started the previous year, when some 1,000 people gathered at three mining sites for three days of peaceful protest. Despite efforts to depoliticize the campaign—including framing the issue as an environmental concern and prominently quoting Chinese President Xi Jinping—armed police attacked the protesters and the gathering ended with arrests, injuries, one death, and one attempted suicide. Activists documented the protest and crackdown, sending high quality video to contacts abroad who in turn reached out to journalists and secured media coverage. The Chinese then began an aggressive reeducation campaign, but Tibetans remained united. When putting pressure on mining companies and local officials did not work, they switched tactics, sending a delegation to Beijing. There, the Tibetans cited local level corruption—the documents authorizing mining had fake seals—and highlighted Zatoe’s status as part of a large environmental reserve. The central government then ordered local authorities to stop the mining activities and the area was designated a National Protected Natural Area. It was a major victory for the local Tibetans.

ISSUE	Illegal mining at sacred mountain sites
WHO	Villagers from Zatoe County
WHERE	Zatoe (Dzatoe or Dzado) County (Atoe, Dzachen, and Chikdza mining sites) Yulshul (Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Kham (Qinghai)
GOALS	Stop mining in Zatoe
STRATEGY	The Zatoe residents’ strategy was to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frame the issue as being about corruption and environmental protection• Avoid framing it as a political conflict, or as Tibetans vs. Chinese• Build large, visible opposition to the mining and publicize the issue• Appeal to central government leaders to override local authorities
PLANNED OR SPONTANEOUS?	Most actions appear to have been planned and carefully coordinated rather than spontaneous.
ISSUE FRAMING	The organizers framed the issue carefully. They: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Depoliticized the protests and framed the issue in terms of a common problem that would resonate with Chinese people• Appealed to national leaders based on environmental laws and the area supposedly being protected under such laws• Showed loyalty to the state, for example with quotes from Xi Jinping and by flying the Chinese flag

LEADERS, PARTICIPANTS, ALLIES INCLUDING ELITES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear who the leaders were or whether the campaign was organized collectively. • Many, perhaps a majority, of the local villagers participated. • Three village heads complained about the crackdown on protesters. It is unclear if they were involved from the beginning or not. • When the village leaders were fired, Tibetan employees in the local (Chinese) government complained, sending a letter to county officials demanding they be reinstated.
TARGET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First, mining operators and local officials • Next, government officials in Beijing
OPPONENT(S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mining operators • Local officials
TACTICS	<p>First Phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argued that mining was illegal and had no authorization from the central government • Mass protest and occupation/sit-in at three mining sites <p>Second Phase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three village heads complained about the crackdown on protesters (and were fired). • Tibetan employees in the government complained about the firing of the village leaders with a letter to county officials demanding they be reinstated. • Tibetans refused to take up positions of fired village leaders. • Activists recorded video footage and sent information to contacts, enabling international publicity. • Protesters traveled to Beijing to present a petition. <p>These actions seem to have been chosen in response to what the opponents did and because the first actions didn't achieve the goal.</p> <p>The main actions of the campaign were high-risk and concentrated in a few locations. Participants were vulnerable to crackdown by authorities, but they also used the crackdown to their advantage. By recording and publicizing the excessive use of force by the police/paramilitary, they attracted international attention and sympathy, as well as exposing what was happening.</p>
RESPONSE BY OPPONENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argued that mining was legal • Enlisted the police and paramilitary to crack down on the protest and sit-in • Removed village leaders from positions • Conducted "political reeducation" for village leaders and the public • Warned against future protest
MEDIA & MESSAGING	<p>The campaign's messages were clear:</p>

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- No mining in Zatoe.
 - Illegal mining is taking place in a Tibetan protected area because of local corruption and needs to stop.
 - The Chinese military is cracking down on Tibetan protesters who are trying to bring attention to mining issues.

There was outreach to international media via contacts abroad and an effort to document the protests and subsequent crackdown in order to use the documentation for media coverage.

The demonstrations and video footage boosted foreign media coverage of the event. Organizers credited the media coverage for playing a big role in their success.

OUTCOMES

- Mining operations in the area were banned by the central government.
- Mining operations stopped in Zatoe as well as nearby areas.
- Affected areas were designated as National Protected Natural Areas.
- All detained protesters were released.