

POLITICS

Shiraz Massacre: Suspicion Falls On Islamic Republic

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📷 CCTV pictures show one purported attacker inside the shrine.

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On Wednesday, October 26, as thousands of protesters across Iran marked the 40th day since the death of Mahsa Amini in the custody of Morality Police, official news agencies reported a deadly **“terrorist attack”** on a Shia shrine in the southern city of Shiraz.

The news broke after several prominent figures and media outlets close to the clerical regime warned Iranians they should expect “terrorist operations” in Iran.

The judiciary’s Mizan news agency was **the first** to call the attack on Shahcheragh Shrine a “terrorist attack.” Then Fars and Tasnim news agencies followed suit by emphasizing the “terrorist” nature of the assault that, according to official reports, claimed the lives of 15 people and wounded more than 40 people.

Quoting General Raham Bakhsh Habibi, the police commander in Fars province, early reports said that the attack was carried out by only “one person” who “was arrested after being injured.”

Late in the day, the Entekhab website published CCTV pictures from inside the shrine showing one alleged attacker. However, one hour after the attack, Tasnim quoted Esmail Mohebbipour, the provincial deputy governor for security, as saying that three attackers were involved in the assault. “Two attackers have already been arrested and the security forces are continuing their efforts to apprehend the third individual,” Mohebbipour said.

Predictions of Terrorist Atta

In recent weeks, as protest rallies over Amini's death continued unabated, media outlets and prominent figures affiliated with the regime have warned that terrorist attacks against Iran were being prepared. Ali Akbar Raefipour, head of the Masaf Institute think tank and a well-known conspiracy theorist, warned a TV audience that "mine cave ins and murders of celebrities" might be coming. "The plan is to kill, to shed blood," Raefipour said.

Quoting an "informed source," Mashregh, a website affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), wrote on October 17: "New information indicate that the policy of killings will continue, this time by the assassination of a number of actors and athletes who live abroad and who have called on the people to riot and cause mayhem in the country."

In the past few days, several figures within the regime have repeated similar predictions, including one who **tweeted**: "It is very likely that they will put on a new show aimed at fanning the flames of riots on the 40th day since [the death] of that girl."



A lot remains unknown about what happened at Shahcheragh Shrine but it would not be the first time the Islamic Republic has tried to exploit "terrorist operations" against holy sites. One was the bombing of Imam Reza Shrine in the holy city of Mashhad on June 20, 1994, which coincided with Ashura, the holiest day on the Shia Muslim calendar.

A Bombing at the Service of the Revolution

The bomb used in the Mashhad attack contained 4.5 kilograms of TNT, according to experts. It killed 26 people and injured more than 300 others.

In January 2019, Mostafa Tajzadeh, who served as deputy interior minister under reformist President Mohammad Khatami, **revealed** the truth about the blast. According to Tajzadeh, then Deputy Minister for Domestic Security Affairs Saeed Emami planned the attack on Imam Reza Shrine following a series of assassinations of Iranian dissidents and intellectuals. The Ministry of Intelligence was the organization behind this wave of killings, called the "**Chain Murders.**"

The ministry gave the officials responsible for investigating the Mashhad bombing a piece of communication from a Taliban commander stationed near the border between Iran and Afghanistan that said: "Operation has been completed." At the time, of course, thousands of military operations were taking place in Afghanistan, but Emami decided to claim that this one was referring to the bombing of the shrine in Mashhad. He told the officials that making this news public would worsen the tensions between Shias and Sunnis and might lead to a war with the Taliban, so the bombing must be attributed to the opposition to avoid such an outcome.

Even before the 1979 Islamic Revolution that deposed Iran's shah, current Islamic Republic officials committed similar acts. On August 19, 1978, the Cinema Rex in Abadan was set ablaze, killing up to 470 people. The shah's government blamed Islamic militants but the revolutionaries, supported by the Islamic Republic's founding father, Ayatollah Khomeini, accused the monarch's secret police. It was only two years after the revolution that an Islamic Republic court ruled that a group of revolutionaries was behind the tragedy and sent those found guilty to the gallows.



The news network of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) broke the news about the attack on Shiraz's Shahcheragh Shrine by displaying a banner at the bottom of the TV screen at 17:59 on October 26. CCTV pictures from inside the shrine showed an alleged attacker entering the shrine at 17:43.



Before more details about the attack were reported, meaning in the early minutes of the attack, a flyer about the assault was posted on **Rubika**, the Islamic Republic's messaging app, an Instagram knockoff.

This flyer, which the East Azerbaijan Matna Telegram channel said was created by the paramilitary Basij in that province, was first posted on Telegram at 17:45, only two minutes after the attack was launched.



Blame Quickly Falls on Islamic State

In the past decade or so, the Islamic Republic's propaganda machine has always had the same response to nationwide protests triggered by the regime's numerous policy failures: "But we have security," a claim that has been consistently undermined by an increase in petty crimes caused by a steep economic downturn and poverty. Still, officials have tried to silence protesters by instilling fear of insecurity in people's minds.

In the early hours after the attack on the shrine was reported, parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf condemned the protests and said: "By resorting to terrorism and by shooting at innocent, defenseless and religious people, the enemies...showed that they are fundamentally enemies of their religious faith."

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi claimed that "the enemy" was now using the turmoil to resort to acts of terrorism.

Immediately after the attack, security agencies claimed that both the perpetrators and organizers were identified. That was given that it took days for an official medical report on Amini's death to be published.

Media outlets linked to the Iranian regime have published a picture of what they claim was a page from the Islamic State's website Amaq in which the group claimed responsibility. However, the picture contains several glaring errors.

The date on the picture is Rabi' al-Awwal 30 in the Islamic lunar calendar whereas, this year, Wednesday, October 26, corresponds to Rabi' al-Awwal 29 in the Iranian solar calendar and Rabi' al-Thani 1 in the Arabic calendar. But this year, the month of Rabi' al-Awwal in the lunar calendar has 29 days, not 30 days.

Also, the picture of the page attributed to ISIS features an Arabic term meaning "suicide attack" whereas none of the official reports mentioned anything about an explosion at the shrine.

In addition, the spelling in the picture follows the Persian rules of writing - not the Arabic ones.

After nearly 10 hours, the ISIS propaganda outlet Amaq published a different report about the attack that cites unidentified "security sources." In the past, the extremist group has always directly taken responsibility for its terrorist operations without quoting any sources.



Also, in November, late General Ghasem Soleimani, then-commander of the IRGC's overseas arm, the Quds Force, officially congratulated Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei for the "end" of ISIS. Five years later, as nationwide protests against the Iranian regime continued for more than five weeks, ISIS is again blamed for a terrorist attack.

New Collapse of Metropol Building

In the midst of news about the crackdown on protesters marking 40th day since Amini's death and the attack on Shahcheragh Shrine in Shiraz, it was reported that remains of the collapsed Metropol Tower in Abadan fell once again, killing a woman sitting in a car parked next to the building. According to the official news agency IRNA, the number of casualties is not yet final.

The tower **crashed down** on May 23 this year because construction safety guidelines were not respected, a consequence of widespread corruption within government officials. A planned demolition of the building's remains was under way when some parts collapsed although experts had warned about this possibility.

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