

Gunmen Attack Army Parade in Iran Leaving Dozens Dead

Both Islamic State and Ahwaz National Resistance claim responsibility for assault in Ahwaz that killed at least 25 soldiers and civilians

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Global Research, September 22, 2018

[Middle East Eye](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Terrorism](#)

Iran president Hassan Rouhani has vowed a “crushing response” after four gunmen attacked a military parade in the city of Ahwaz, killing at least 25 people, including soldiers and civilians.

The fighters opened fire on a large crowd of spectators watching the parade in the southwestern city and then attempted to attack the viewing stand for official dignitaries before being shot and wounded by security forces, the semi-official Fars news agency said.

The official state news agency IRNA said 53 people had also been wounded in Saturday’s attack and that many were in a critical condition.

“There are a number of non-military victims, including women and children who had come to watch the parade,” the agency quoted an unnamed official source as saying.

“The response of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the smallest threat will be crushing,” Rouhani said in a statement on his official website.

“Those who give intelligence and propaganda support to these terrorists must answer for it.”

A video distributed to Iranian media showed soldiers at the parade, an annual event marking the start of the country’s 1980-88 war with Iraq, crawling on the ground as gunfire blazed in their direction.

“Three of the terrorists were killed on the spot and a fourth one who was injured died in hospital,” Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi, a senior spokesman for Iran’s armed forces, told state television.

At least eight members of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard are among those killed, reports say. ISNA quoted Khuzestan province’s deputy governor Ali-Hossein Hosseinzadeh as saying:

“One of the martyrs is a journalist.”

Fars said the attack started at 9am local time (05:30 GMT), with witnesses saying it lasted

about 10 minutes.

“Shooting began by several gunmen from behind the stand during the parade. There are several killed and injured,” a correspondent told state television.

The semi-official news agency Mehr said further shooting broke out as some of the attackers who managed to escape were being chased.

Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed condolences to Iran’s president following the attack, saying Moscow was ready to boost joint efforts in the fight against terrorism, Russia’s RIA news quoted the Kremlin as saying.

Different groups claim attack

Both the Islamic State (IS) and an anti-government Arab group have claimed responsibility for the attack.

A spokesperson for the Ahwaz National Resistance told the Reuters news agency it had undertaken the assault.

Yaghub Hur Totsari, a spokesman for one of the two groups that identify themselves as the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz, said the Ahwaz National Resistance, an umbrella organization of armed movements, was behind the attack but did not specify which group.

Totsari identified one of the assailants by the initials AM, without elaborating.

Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said the Ahwaz National Resistance was “likely” behind the attack.

Iran's ambassador to the UK [@baeidinejad](#) condemns the London-based exiled television Iran International – run by a company owned by a Saudi national – for airing an interview with spokesperson of a separatist group behind today's terrorist attack in Iran: <https://t.co/7W1Dg8JB9v>

— Saeed Kamali Dehghan (@SaeedKD) [September 22, 2018](#)

Later on Saturday, IS claimed responsibility for the attack, according to the group’s Amaq news agency. The group provided no evidence for the claim, Reuters reported.

Writing on Twitter, Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif blamed “a foreign regime” backed by the United States for the attack.

“Terrorists recruited, trained, armed & paid by a foreign regime have attacked Ahvaz,” Zarif said in a tweet, adding: “Iran holds regional terror sponsors and their US masters accountable for such attacks.

“Iran will respond swiftly and decisively in defence of Iranian lives,” Zarif vowed, adding “children and journos” were “among casualties”.

An Iranian military spokesman said the gunmen were trained by two Gulf Arab states and had ties to the US and Israel.

“These terrorists ... were trained and organised by two ... Gulf countries,” Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi told the official news agency IRNA.

“They are not from Daesh [Islamic State] or other groups fighting [Iran’s] Islamic system ... but they are linked to America and [Israel’s intelligence agency] Mossad.”

Yahya Rahim Safavi, a senior Iranian Revolutionary Guards official, has vowed retaliation for the attack.

“Enemies should not imagine that they can gain dignity with this sinister move. The Iranian people and the armed forces will respond to this,” he was quoted by IRNA as saying. Iran was holding similar parades in several cities including the capital Tehran and the port of Bandar Abbas on the Gulf.

State television blamed “takfiri elements,” a reference to Sunni fighters, for the attack.

Ahwaz is in the centre of Khuzestan province, where there have been sporadic protests by the Arab minority in mainly Shia Iran.

ISNA said an unnamed spokesman for the elite Revolutionary Guards security force blamed Arab nationalists backed by Saudi Arabia for the attack.

Tensions between traditional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia have surged in recent years, with the two countries supporting opposite sides in wars in Syria and Yemen and rival political parties in Iraq and Lebanon.

Attacks on the military are rare in Iran.

Last year, in the first deadly attack claimed by Islamic State in Tehran, 18 people were killed at the parliament and mausoleum of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder and first leader of the Islamic Republic.

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