



[An Attack on a Shia Religious Shrine in Iran that Killed at Least 15 People Offers Proof of a Troubling Re-Emergence of ISIS in the Region](#)

In the spring of 2019, former U.S. President Donald Trump announced that ISIS had been eradicated from the last of their territorial strongholds in Baghouz, Syria. The proclamation was viewed as a positive development in combating the extremist group which first rose to prominence in the early to mid-2010s. Accordingly, news coverage of ISIS came to a relative halt. ISIS was no longer on every politician's lips, and people moved on. To be sure, the group suffered major setbacks, but activity in recent years has indicated that while ISIS no longer holds wide swathes of land under its control, it remains a credible threat at the very least. Over the preceding years, ISIS has reinvented itself. What was once a pseudo-army that dominated about a third of Syria and a quarter of Iraq has now returned to its humbler roots. Like most terrorist organizations, ISIS operates in the shadows. In small bands of people, they raid villages and assassinate low-level officials, such as the *mukhtars* who lead villages. According to the Crisis Group, their activities "seem both inexpensive and self-sustaining." *Mukhtar* assassinations also have an isolating impact on the communities they effect. In rural Iraq, *mukhtars* are the primary means of communication with larger entities. Without them, ISIS is able to increase their influence and spread more terror without government interference. When the government does become concerned with their dealings, ISIS evades them by taking refuge in caves, deserted towns, or other rugged terrain that makes them difficult to find and nearly impossible to confront directly.

While most analysts agree that ISIS does not have the power it once did – predominantly in regard to leverage, which requires territory – it certainly presents a different variety of threat. Furthermore, although the guerilla model of terrorism is familiar, it is nonetheless effective, especially keeping in mind the capital that ISIS built up during their peak years which the United Nations and other governments have estimated at \$300 million. In addition, ISIS's network remains both widespread and eerily large, with the UN estimating that the group has up to 30,000 foreign recruits. To this point today, ISIS conducts operations in Libya, Nigeria, West Africa, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Iran, where at least 15 people were killed on Wednesday when three armed gunmen entered the Shah Cheragh Shrine in Shiraz, Iran, and opened fire. Two of the gunmen have since been apprehended. In the aftermath, ISIS quickly took credit for the attack, while an Iranian-affiliated news outlet supported that idea by saying that the shooting was not led by locals. As for the Iranian government's position, they have placed blame on "takfiri terrorists," a name that is often used for Sunni extremists.

Large-scale attacks such as these are uncommon for ISIS in today's world, but UN Secretary-General António Guterres has expressed concern that ISIS may only be biding their time before returning to the forefront. Based on their immense resources and an uptick in activity of late, researchers agree that such a resurgence is far from an impossibility. Ultimately, ISIS is a potent threat, even from behind the scenes and with the potential for deadly attacks like the one this week in Iran.