

An ISIL attack on a shrine in Shiraz furthers Iran's political instability.

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Vakil Mosque in Shiraz, Iran¹

Jacob Sagers – The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) claimed responsibility for an attack on a shrine in Shiraz, Iran on October 26. Fifteen people were killed and it comes amid the backdrop of protests from the death of Mahsa Amini. It portrays an increasingly volatile situation in Iran amid a crisis in national identity with societal and religious clashes.

National identity is the way people see themselves as a member of a nation. People's attachment to a nation, a common group or heritage, then generally translates into a commitment to a state, or what is frequently called a country. Iran has built a national identity based on Persia's historical legacy and predominately adhering to Shia Islam, rather than the Sunni sect. It may be confusing why ISIL would attack, "...an important site for religious pilgrims" given it is sacred for many Muslims. Nevertheless, rivalries in religion, and competition between governments, alter national identity and the ways that terrorists operate. General distrust, and sometimes hate, between Sunni and Shia Muslims has spanned since the death of the Prophet Muhammed in the 7th century. Sunni dominance, with over 90% of Muslims adhering to the sect, allows the Iranian government to portray it as necessary to maintain the survival of Shia branch of Islam. Religion influences the heritage and national identity of the Iranian people and can lead to their support or attachment to Iran. This is despite its strict adherence to Sharia law and hierarchical theocratic government amidst threats

from Sunni jihadist organizations that are currently posing threats to Iran's stability.

Still, the attack was strategically planned, as ISIL believes in making extreme versions of Sunni Islam and Sharia law the world's norm. The attack of the shrine showcases its use as a locale. A locale is an institution that helps organize people in a location. Targeting mosques or shrines affects the locale and helps terrorists maximize instilling fear into civilians. Breaking down local institutions can lessen a citizen's attachment to their state or identity. Nevertheless, how will the government of Iran respond, given current political turmoil and its support for terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas?

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