

Iran: 8 Revolutionary Guard members killed in gun attack, minister blames US

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Tehran: Eight of Iran military's elite Revolutionary Guard members were killed and 20 others were injured as gunmen attacked an annual military parade on Saturday in the country's oil-rich southwest region of Ahvaz.

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State television aired footage of the aftermath of the assault on Ahvaz's Quds, or Jerusalem, Boulevard. The images included paramedics trying to help one person in military fatigues as other armed security personnel shouted at each other. The semi-official ISNA news agency published photographs of the attack's aftermath, with bloodied troops in dress uniforms helping each other walk away.

A local news agency in Khuzestan province, of which Ahvaz is the capital, aired grainy mobile phone footage showing parade goers fleeing as soldiers lay flat on the ground. Gunfire rang out in the background.

"Security forces have restored security in the area but the parade has totally been disrupted," a reporter on the scene for Iranian state television said by phone in a live broadcast. "People have been killed but we have no figures yet."

Reports of how the attack unfolded remained unclear immediately afterward. The state TV reporter said the gunfire came from a park behind a riser. The semi-official Fars news agency, which is close to the Guard, said two gunmen on a motorcycle wearing khaki uniforms carried out the attack.

The state-run IRNA news agency said 20 people had been wounded. The semi-official Tasnim news agency said at least eight member of the Guard had been killed.

The state television immediately described the assailants as "Takfiri gunmen," a term previously used to describe the Islamic State group. Iran has been deeply involved in the fight against IS in Iraq and has aided embattled Syrian President Bashar Assad in his country's long war.

Meanwhile, Guard spokesman Gen. Ramazan Sharif told ISNA that an Arab separatist group carried out the attack, without elaborating. However, those groups in the past previously have only attacked unguarded oil pipelines at night.

Saturday's attack comes after a coordinated June 7, 2017 Islamic State group assault on parliament and the shrine of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Tehran. At least 18 people were killed and more than 50 wounded in an attack that saw gunmen carrying Kalashnikov assault rifles and.

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif immediately blamed the attack on regional countries and their "U.S. masters," further raising regional tensions as Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers is in jeopardy after President Donald Trump withdrew America from the accord.

â€œIran will respond swiftly and decisively in defense of Iranian lives,â€• he wrote on Twitter.

- (With AP inputs)