

# Incidents of Anti-Shiism in March, 2018

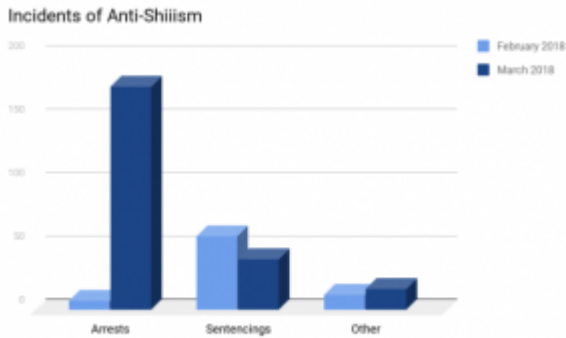
## Incidents of Anti-Shiism in March 2018

February's lower turnout of anti-Shiism did not last long, as March totaled an additional 113 incidents of anti-Shiism to last month's 359, amounting to 472. The spike in occurrences can be attributed mainly to a mass number of arrests in Bahrain and a sharp increase in Shia casualties in Afghanistan due to a rise of extremist cells in the country. The month of March resulted in 60 deaths and 154 injuries, averaging 7 people critically injured or murdered every day this month. 197 Shia Muslims were arbitrarily arrested this month, and 40 people were sentenced to prison on the basis of fabricated allegations, averaging 8 incarcerations each day as well. 19 other anti-Shia related incidents occurred this month including but not limited to, vandalization of mosques, attacks on freedom of speech and expression, prison punishment, coerced confessions, and denial of citizenship or nationality. Overall, the number of anti-Shia incidents averaged around 15 every day, shedding light on the severity of the wrongful persecution with which the Shia population is burdened.

### **Bahrain**

This month in Bahrain, the Shia population saw more than two times the amount of anti-Shiism than it experienced last month in February. Bahrain saw a total of 234 anti-Shia incidents this month, more than 3 times that of February. With an astounding spike of 176 arbitrary arrests, 40 unlawful prison sentencings and a number of reported cases of prisoner abuse and attempts by the regime to thwart freedom of speech and expression, Bahrain's Shia population was directly faced with a stark reality that their hopes of living freely without discrimination remain

not quite yet in reach.



March began with the sentencing of 2 individuals on false allegations of traveling to Iran and receiving training from Iran's Revolutionary Guard. Each were sentenced to 7 years in prison, and their Bahraini citizenship was stripped, adding to the issue of Shia statelessness so prominent in Bahrain due to the Regime's efforts to retain power through a corrupt political system. Iran denied the allegations and claimed that they were fabricated.

A day later, 116 Bahraini Shia was arrested on the same false accusations of terrorism and traveling to Iran to receive training from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, however, sentences have yet to be imposed.

March 7th saw the sentencing of 17 more Bahraini Shia in 3 separate cases of unfounded terrorism charges, revoking the citizenship of 14 and leaving them stateless. Of the 17, 1 was given the death penalty, 9 were sentenced to life imprisonment, 5 were handed 15 year sentences, 1 was given 10 years, and another faces 6 months in prison on the charge of "illegal gathering", a punishable crime that the government of Bahrain uses to prohibit its Shia population from participating in both religious gatherings and protests against the injustices they face.

Within a week, 10 more Bahraini citizens had been sentenced to prison on similarly groundless allegations of terrorism. 6 of them are facing life imprisonment, and 4 are facing 3 years each.

On March 22nd, Bahraini security forces dressed in civilian clothes raided 18 homes in Diraz, vandalizing and looting the houses before arresting a total of 10 people. Those who were taken into custody are Hussein Mohammed Saleh, Sayed Ahmed Sayed Majid, Hassan Mulla Ali Jassem, Mohammed Fadel Abdul Rahim, Hassan Abdul Khaleq Jassim, Hassan Isa Al Fatlawi and Qasim Aqeel Fadl, and

notably Ali Abdullah Qassim, the son-in-law of top Shia cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim, who has been under de-facto house arrest since the revocation of his citizenship in June 2016.

A day later, in the 24 hours between March 23rd and 24th, 32 more Bahraini Shia were arrested in separate raids carried out by security forces. Two raids took place in Diraz, detaining 17 and 15 people respectively, and 1 raid occurred in the Northern village of Buri that involved the looting of a house, before ultimately arresting two brothers, Abdullah and Mohammed Saleh Mahdi. The raids took place without any police warrants, and the 32 Shia Muslims were detained without any charges being brought upon them.

In the early hours of March 26th, security forces raided dozens of homes in the villages of Diraz, al-Daih, al-Musalla, and Jidhafs, forcibly kidnapping 17 citizens and transporting them to an unknown location, where it is feared that they will be tortured into false confessions; a practice routinely carried out by the government. Of those kidnapped are: Ahmad Saleh, Yousif Saleh, Jaafar Hani, Hussein Hani, Mohammad Shaker, Amjad Abdullah, Sultan Isa, Hussein Al-Khair, Montazar Al-Khair, Sayed Mohammad Sayed Hussein, Ali Bader Al-Jaziri, and Rouh Alla Abduzahraa, Hussein Mushaima, Ali Al-Shamloul, Abdullah Jaafar Al-Samoum, Ahmad Samir ,and Rida Mohammad Ali Zainuldeen.

Two days later, 9 more Bahraini citizens were sentenced to prison on fabricated charges of terrorism. 8 men received 7 years in prison each, and one minor was sentenced to 3 years in prison. On the same day, award-winning photojournalist Sayed Ahmed Al-Mousawi had his 10-year sentence upheld, and his citizenship revoked. Mousawi was arrested in 2014 after documenting a series of protests that year, and convicted in 2015 on terrorism charges.

In a report published on March 29th, a 15-year-old arrested by the Bahraini regime came forward to say that he had been tortured and forced into signing a confession that said he was guilty of arson, although he was not. This exemplifies the illegitimacy of Bahrain's criminal charges and allegations brought upon its Shia citizens, as when evidence is lacking, a coerced confession allows a trial and sentencing.

The Bahraini Regime continues to arbitrarily arrest its Shia citizens under the claim of 'national security', without any reasonable evidence to back the

allegations they claim. The false allegations and charges of ties to Iran due to its majority Shia population are unfounded and exemplify the corruption and discrimination against the Shia population in the country as institutionalized anti-Shia issues that affect the everyday lives of Bahrain's majority population.

In a continuation of Bahrain's effort to decrease the majority of Shia citizens in the country and strip their rights to fair trial, medical attention, education, employment, and housing, Bahraini officials have refused to grant citizenship to the daughter of a prominent Shia leader and activist, Sheikh Ali Salman, even though she has all of the necessary legal documentation. Her father has been serving a 9-year prison sentence since 2014 after being arrested on charges of "insulting government officials" and "inciting unrest" after peacefully protesting for government reform.

On March 9th, Shia citizens in the northern villages of Abu Saiba and Shakhora, which are west of the capital city of Manama, took to the streets to protest, calling for government reform and a political system that represents all Bahrainis, including Shia. The protests did not end there, however, as even behind bars in a Bahraini prison, 49 year old Hajer Mansoor, who was sentenced alongside her 18-month old son last October both on terrorism charges, began her second hunger strike to protest against the treatment of prisoners in Bahrain, and was admitted to the hospital on March 9th.

Her protests are not unfounded, as this month, Issa al-Mutawa, a prisoner in Bahrain's Jaw prison is being punished for his decision to observe a Shia religious occasion last month. He is, for the next two months, prohibited from purchasing any basic goods or necessities that are provided at the detention facility, which will impact his health and well being in the already unsanitary conditions.

Shortly after a Twitter campaign by activists demanding his immediate release, blind Bahraini prisoner Jaafar Maatouk was moved to solitary confinement. Maatouk is currently serving a life sentence on politically motivated charges and was stripped of his citizenship in 2014. In the days following, the Interior Minister of Bahrain stated that he was looking into a new law that would "deal with unprecedented chaos by disruptive social media accounts", essentially threatening to punish online activists for exercising their freedom of speech.

Bahrain's Shia population continues to suffer under the backlash of oppressive

Regime force. The astounding number of Shia citizens arbitrarily arrested every day, and the lack of fair trial for their population makes living in the Gulf country a nightmare for Shia Muslims, and does not take the weight off of living elsewhere, as the regime continually strips the citizenship of those traveling outside of Bahrain's borders so that they are unable to return.

Bahrain's human rights situation is in need of immediate attention as the government's daily offenses against the majority of its civilian population need to end.

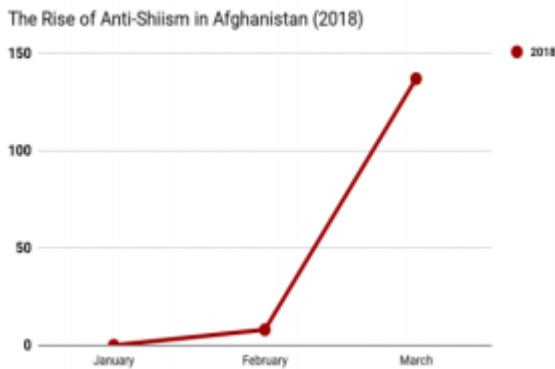
## **Afghanistan**

Afghanistan saw its first sharp rise in anti-Shiism this year with an increase in the targeting of Shia mosques and neighborhoods. The rising presence of radical extremism in Afghanistan can be held accountable for the increase in attacks against the Shia population in the country. This month, Afghanistan saw 41 deaths and 96 injuries among the casualties of targeted attacks against Shia Muslims.

On March 10th, a bomb was placed and detonated outside of a Shia mosque in Kabul, as civilians of the Shia faith had gathered in remembrance of Abdul Ali Mazari, an ethnic Hazara political leader who was killed by the Taliban in 1995. The blast took a total of 9 lives and left 18 others critically injured.

Just over a week later, 5 Shia university students were critically injured by a grenade blast in their Shia-dominated neighborhood. The attacker disguised himself by wearing a school uniform into the academic campus, and detonated the grenade on a suicide mission, with the goal of killing the Shia students that he targeted. While no group claimed responsibility for the attack, the takfiri motives resemble that of a number of extremist groups that continually target the

minority Shia population because of their beliefs.



On March 22nd, terrorists affiliated with Daesh detonated a bomb outside of a Shia shrine in the Karte Sakhi area of Kabul, where a large number of civilians were gathered to celebrate Nowruz, the start of the Persian New Year. The blast, clearly targeting the Shia population, took the lives of 31 people and injured an additional 65.

Three days after this bombing, another targeted suicide attack killed 1 person and critically injured another 8. The bombing took place outside of a Shia place of worship, similarly to the tactics of most anti-Shia attacks this month. Two suicide bombers attempted to enter the mosque but were met by security forces. One of the bombers was killed before he could detonate his device, but the other detonated his causing the civilian casualties.

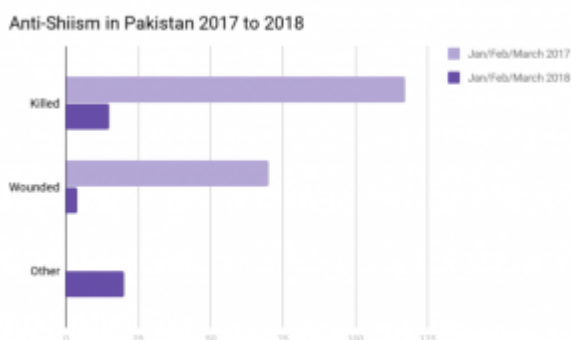
The Shia population in Afghanistan faces persecution from extremist groups who take refuge there due to the political instability of the country. Groups such as ISIS regularly attack Shia population because of their religious belief. The death and injury toll among Shia Muslims was much higher this month than the first two months of this year, and it is important to note that the high number of casualties resulted from just 4 events, targeted at places of worship and schools. The number of events and the locations they take place are a clear indication of anti-Shiism in that the groups that carry out these attacks are not only obviously targeting the Shia population, but also targeting the Shia population in mass numbers, with a purpose to kill indiscriminately. These events are not isolated but are the end-product of a string of radical ideologies across the country that look down upon the Shia population and seek to abolish them.

## **Pakistan**

Pakistan's Shia Muslims, similarly to Afghanistan's, face the constant threat of

terrorist attacks, and a lack of serious government intervention to stop extremist groups from acting on their anti-Shia sentiments, which allows for radical ideologies to flourish. The ASWJ (Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama) terrorist group is responsible for the majority of attacks against Pakistani Shia. The first three months of 2018 have shown to be much calmer in Pakistan than the same time period last year, however, the continued targeting of Shia Muslims whether in mass numbers or minute, exemplifies that the anti-Shia sentiments are still present in the minds of many. This month, the ASWJ group killed 4 Shia civilians, injured 3, and brought 20 others upon fabricated blasphemy charges through a connection to Pakistan's JUI (Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam), a religious and political party.

In the first week of the month, there were 3 separate targeted attacks on Shia Muslims. The first, which took place in Kohat, resulted in the death of a primary school headmaster. The attacker was not identified as he fled the scene immediately. The following two shootings occurred in Quetta, and resulted in the death of a Shia Muslim youth, Sajid Ali, and a policeman protecting fruit sellers of the Shia Hazara community. Another policeman was also injured in the attack.



A fourth shooting took place in Karachi on March 22nd, taking the life of Ameer Ali as he was driving in his car near Memon Hospital. Members of the ASWJ group open fire into his car killing him immediately and injuring two-year-old Ali Asghar, son of Ali Imran, and 30-year old Ali Raza, who were passengers at the time.

On March 17th, terrorists from the aforementioned ASWJ group made their way into a Husseinayah (an Islamic center) in Dera Ismail Khan, and ransacked the place of worship before destroying and defacing the holy symbols of Shia Islam. This attack reminds us that although most attacks in Pakistan are individual shootings, the ideology behind the action involves a deeper level of anti-Shia

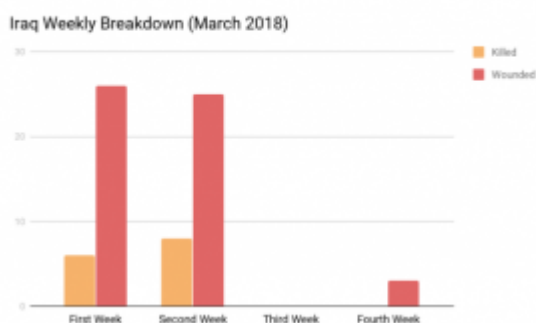
sentiment, and brings to light that the targets are not random civilians, but specifically Shia Muslims.

This is further exemplified 3 days later, when Abdullah Sindhi, a member of the ASWJ terrorist group, used his connections within the JUI to bring a case of blasphemy upon 20 Shia Muslims who were chanting religious slogans praising their Imam in Sind, Pakistan. The case was brought up in an attempt to defame Shia Islam and to regard those who follow it as blasphemous and punishable by law, in an attempt to make the religious discrimination in Pakistan political, rather than just extremist.

The issue of terrorism is prominent in Pakistan and must be addressed, as not only are the killings of Shia Muslims wreaking havoc on the daily lives and security of those living in the country, but it is beginning to infiltrate into the political system as exemplified through the blasphemy case. If the ideologies of these extremist groups are able to gather momentum and influence in the politics of Pakistan, the continual abuse of Shia Muslims could become institutionalized and systematic, which would escalate and justify violence, and deteriorate the standard of living for Shia Muslims in the country.

## Iraq

Iraq faced another month of turmoil in March with the continuation of ruthless bombings by what is assumed to be the takfiri tactics of Daesh. The country saw a total of 20 violent incidents this month, the majority of which came in the form of roadside bombings. Iraqi Shia lives through the threat every day of being targeted by extremist groups, as most days entail multiple different bombings from the time of sunrise to sunset. In March, a total of 14 Shia Muslims were killed, and an additional 60 were wounded due to targeted attacks on followers of Shia Islam.



On the first day of the month, a total of 2 people were killed and 4 people were



wounded in two separate attacks. The first event took place outside of a popular Baghdad market, at which an explosive device was detonated killing 1 and injuring 4. The second attack on March 1st occurred in Baghdad as well and killed 1 man when a sticky explosive device placed under the wheel of his car was detonated.

No less than 24 hours later, another roadside bomb exploded west of Baghdad, killing 1 and critically injuring 2 others. This attack was followed closely by another on March 3rd, where the bodies of two Shia men were found in the southeast of Baghdad. In a turn away from the typical method of bombing bringing terror to Iraqi Shia, these two men were deemed to have gunshot and stabbing wounds, suggesting that the aggressor was physically attacking them at the time of their deaths.

March 4th and 5th brought 7 more people to the hospital with critical injuries from three separate bombing attacks in the east and south of Baghdad. 2 people were injured by a roadside bomb, and the other 5 were injured by explosive devices at popular markets in the city.

The 6th through the 8th of the month injured a total of 13 Shia, and killed 1. All of these casualties were the result of explosive devices detonated in the typical Daesh areas such as on a roadside or at a popular market in or around Baghdad. The first week of March alone saw a total of 26 injuries and 6 deaths among the Shia population, averaging 4 casualties each day. The ability for takfiri groups in Iraq to continually target the Shia population needs to be put to an end, and Shia Rights Watch condemns the continual allowance of targeted attacks against Shia Muslims in Iraq.

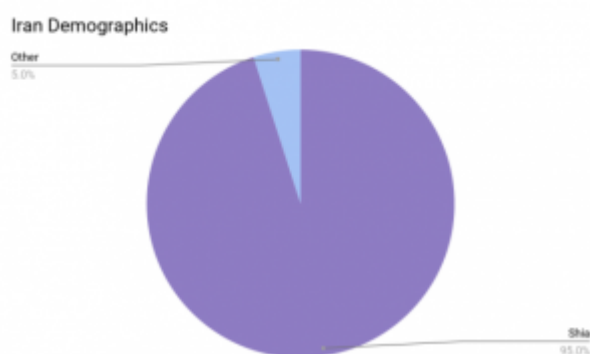
The attacks did not stop there, however, as the next 5 days brought more chaos with the death of 8 more civilians and the injury of 25. The majority of these attacks were a string of roadside bombings in and around Baghdad, killing a total of 5 and wounding 24. 3 deaths came as a result of a shooting, in which a member of Daesh broke into a home and shot and killed a doctor and two women. In a separate event, 1 person was injured when extremists threw a grenade into a cafe as they drove by on motorcycles.

Lastly, on March 26th, 3 more civilians were injured when an explosive device was detonated in their Baghdad neighborhood.

The Shia population in Iraq is constantly terrorized by the animosity of extremist groups that seek to abolish people that follow Shia Islam as it differs from their own beliefs. Religious tolerance must be discussed openly and implemented through legal means in order to work towards ending the chaos in Iraq and put an end to the abuse that extremist groups exercise.

## Iran

Iran, although a Shia majority country, Many Shia scholars, and activist are under pressure. Historically the government of Iran does not tolerate political critiques or calls for reform, therefore, although one may be Shia, openly sharing views and perspectives that go against government policies or actions can lead to persecution in the country and did this month.



Early on March 6th, Ayatollah Sayed Hussain al-Shirazi, prominent Shia cleric and Executive Director of the Shirazi Foundation, was stopped by Iranian security forces on his way home from his morning lectures with his father, Grand Ayatollah Shirazi. He was forcibly pulled out of his car and thrown to the ground, where the security forces removed his turban, degrading him in public. He was then detained and transported to an undisclosed location.

The act is a continuation of previous years' crackdowns on relatives and supporters of the Grand Ayatollah Shirazi, whose organization is both non-political and non-profit, and works to promote the social welfare of Muslims and all people through education, research, think tanks, and media. The foundation also acts as a link to inquiries about the Shia faith and Islamic Law.

The organization and its affiliates are under constant pressure by the Iranian government, due to their non-government affiliated critiques of Iran's

governance, and Iran attempts to repress their freedom of speech and freedom of expression through arbitrary arrests and use of force against the supporters and family members of Grand Ayatollah Shirazi.

This event brings concerns of an emergence of anti-Shiism in Iran, which regards itself as an Islamic republic, as those who express their religious views and critique how the Islamic republic should operate based off of the same religious views it was founded upon are punished by arrest and imprisonment. Iran must allow its citizens the freedom of expression to speak openly about both their religious views and their political views, otherwise, they are denying a fundamental right to their Shia people; a right that they condemn other countries for taking away from the same population.

## **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia is a repeat oppressor of Shia Muslims, as the very school of religious thought that their kingdom is founded upon disagrees with the belief system that Shia Islam follows. While much of the abuse in Saudi Arabia goes unreported by the government, it is known that often Saudi Shia are convicted on false allegations of “blasphemy” and “terrorism” for exercising their religious freedoms, and imprisoned with harsh sentences including, but not limited to, death.

Two men from Saudi Arabia’s Shia-majority Eastern province were each sentenced to 20 years in prison in Saudi Arabia this month. They were convicted on the fabricated allegations of having ties to Iran, a common theme in the oppression of Shia Muslims, and for intent to create political unrest and disrupt the unity of Saudi Arabia. These charges act as a facade to the systematic repression and discrimination against Shia people in the country.

While death may be the harshest punishment, the prisoners in Saudi Arabia also suffer incessant torture and abuses in prison, which resulted in two casualties this month. One prisoner, Ahmed Attia was tortured so brutally in Saudi prisons after being deported from Bahrain that he lost his memory entirely, and another prisoner, 61-year-old Haj Ali Jassim Nazia, was tortured to death in Saudi Arabian prison on March 13th.

The brutal force used by the Saudi regime to eradicate religious freedom from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a breeding ground for extremist sentiment and fosters

the very thoughts that spread around the world and lead to the widespread abuses against the Shia population.

### **Conclusion**

The month of March saw over 100 more incidents of anti-Shiism than the month of February, making a statement in numbers and in lost loved ones that the Shia population is continuing to face a multitude of abuses around the world. From extremist groups bombing masses of people, to targeted shootings, to systematic oppression through government policy and military force, the Shia population fears for their lives and families every day, and action is taken by governments and the international community to put a stop the ruthless repression. Shia Muslims deserve to be treated with dignity rather than as second-class citizens, and their assailants, whether they be extremists or government officials, must be brought to justice.