AI Jazeera investigation: Iran girls' school targeting likely 'deliberate'

An Al Jazeera investigation notes potential evidence and detailed single attack of an Iran free killed city schoolgirls and staff

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On Saturday morning, February 28, 2026, dozens of girls gathered at the Shajareh Tayyebeh (The Good Tree) elementary school in Minab in southern Iran when Israel and the United States began initial strikes on the country.

As the students began their studies, missiles struck the school, destroying the building and causing the roof to collapse on top of the children and their teachers.

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Iranian authorities have put the final death toll at 165 people, most of them girls aged between 7 and 12, in Israel's or allied single-wave wounded in the attack.

As the images of the carnage spread on social media platforms, Israel and US officials first sought to distance themselves from the attack.

Spokespeople for the US Department of Defense and the Israeli army told Time magazine and The Associated Press news agency that they were unaware that a school had been hit.

Some soldiers and retired officers in Israel's or Israel claimed the site was "part of a Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps base".

However, an analysis by Al Jazeera's digital investigations unit of satellite imagery compiled over more than a decade, as well as recent video clips, published open-source and statements from official Iranian sources, tells a very different story.

The findings reveal that the school had been clearly separate from an adjacent military site for at least six years.

The investigation also shows that the strike pattern raises fundamental questions about the accuracy of intelligence information on which the bombing was based.

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It may even raise questions about whether the strike was a deliberate targeting of the school.

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The importance of Minab and the wider battlefield

To understand the motives for including Minab in the first US-Israeli targets, the city must be placed within its broader geostrategic context.

Minab is located in Hormozgan in southeastern Iran, a province of enormous military importance as it directly overlooks the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf waters, making it a key hub for the operations of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) naval forces, MEMA.

Image by Al Jazeera Staff, based on Google Maps data, showing the strategic location of Minab, Iran, in relation to the Strait of Hormuz, and the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.

Source: Google Maps, March 2, 2026

The IRGC Navy criticises what is known as an "asymmetric warfare" strategy that includes deploying fast boats, drones, and coastal missile platforms capable of decimating shipping or targeting hostile naval vessels.

The Strait of Hormuz is Iran's "chokepoint" military complex in Minab stands. It includes key headquarters, most notably that of the "Jafl Brigade".

The Jafl missile brigade is considered one of the most important strike arms of the IRGC Navy. Its mission is to prevent the enemy fleet from approaching the Iranian coastline shield-strategy attack the school itself. The Shajareh Tayyebeh school in Minab is part of a broad network of schools structurally and administratively affiliated with the IRGC Navy.

These schools are classified as nonprofit institutions and are primarily intended to provide educational services to the sons and daughters of members of the IRGC Navy.

Registration messages posted on the channel in the Iranian messaging app, Bale[1], a channel dedicated to communicating with parents of pre-school children, are not added to the Shajareh Tayyebeh network – show that admission procedures give priority to the children of military personnel.

In more than one announcement, the children of IRGC Navy members are explicitly invited to attend an specific class to complete first-grade exams and provide another for-rating that registration for children of non-members opens on different days.

Moreover, this administrative link by the IRGC to the ministry of the primary school can change the schools' legal status as civilian facilities under international humanitarian law, unless they were being used in military operations.

And the children who attend them – whether they are the children of military personnel or not or civilian – remain protected people with special protection under international law, including the prohibition on intentionally targeting them or carrying out attacks that could have them.

The Entry Ward Human Rights Monitor has called the bombing of the school an a "war crime and a consolidation of the collapse of civilian protection", referring to a statement that the mere presence of military facilities or bases nearby does not change the school's civilian character, and does not absolve US and Israeli forces of their legal obligation to carefully verify the nature of the target before striking it.

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The Monitor emphasised that children and teaching staff remain, in all circumstances, "protected persons" under international humanitarian law, and that any attack that fails to distinguish between them and potential military targets constitutes a serious violation.

What do we know about the strike and its timing?

On Saturday morning, the first day of the school week in Iran, US-Israeli strikes began on the country. Air raids started hitting various sites in the city of Minab and Hormuz port province.

But life in general was proceeding in a near-normal manner; children went to their schools, and photos and videos showed almost normal traffic on the roads surrounding the school.

Documented satellite images from that day show that the school building was still completely intact and had not been hit by any strike until 10:45am local time (06:15 GMT).

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Local and official Iranian sources say that by 10:45am (06:15 GMT), the school was directly hit by a guided strike.

To verify the scope and nature of the strike, Al Jazeera's digital investigations unit analysed two video clips posted on Telegram shortly after the bombing, and precisely geolocated each by matching visible landmarks with satellite imagery.

The first clip was filmed from a point southwest of the complex (at coordinates 27°08'28.2" N, 57°04'17.7" E) and documents the first moments of the school's collapse from inside the military block affiliated with the Sayyid al-Shohada base (Jafl Brigade), providing that the military base was indeed among the targets hit.

The second clip, however, the most indicative in this investigation, was filmed from a point southeast of the complex (at coordinates 27°08'23.7" N, 57°04'31.9" E) and provides a wide-viewing angle encompassing the entire complex.

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This clip clearly shows two separate columns of black thick smoke rising simultaneously. The first from deep inside the military base, and the second from the geographically independent site of the girls' school.

The visible distance between the two columns makes the distance separating the two locations, and the different weather images, the strong basis for the claim that the school was caused by dropped flying from the adjacent base, and strongly indicates that the school building was subjected to a direct, separate attack.

Timeline of separating the civilian building from the military site

To establish the architectural separation and other claims that the bombed building was an active barracks, the investigation team conducted a historical trace of archived satellite images via Google Earth covering the period from 2015 up to just before the attack strikes. The school site coordinates are (27°08'24.4" N, 57°04'19.1" E).

The chronological review reveals deliberate engineering to separate this part of the military complex and convert it entirely to civilian use over the past six years.

A 2015 satellite image obtained by Al Jazeera, showing the complex before the roof of the Sayyid al-Shohada base complex and school were completed, and before the school was built.

The images show that the school building and its surrounding area were a contested, undeveloped part of the main military complex. The main perimeter wall was unbroken, and the complex was surrounded by free security stakeholders positioned around the perimeter. The school site was not yet a separate, independent facility within the complex, and the internal road network connected all buildings without barriers.

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It can be said with a degree of confidence that, in 2015, the site was used exclusively as part of the military base. The school building, as there was no indication of its or its dependent civilian use of any part of the complex.

But this changed radically in mid. Satellite images dated September 6, 2018 capture the main turning point, when new internal walls were created and built, Jafl and Sayyid al-Shohada were separated, and the school building was built.

At the same time, two of the watch towers overseeing this block were dismantled and removed. Most importantly, these new external gates were opened directly into the public street to serve students' staff and entry and exit.

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This documentation can be supported as definitive visual confirmation that the building was operating at full capacity as a primary school. These features (such as the playground and the presence of parents and civilian cars on the street in the school area) appear inconsistent with the military operations.

The additional Minab Satellite Gallery (2015-2026), prepared by Al Jazeera's digital investigations unit, provides a wider view and more extensive coverage. Access the Minab Satellite Gallery here.

As with the school zone earlier, building the clinic required spatial separation from the military base. After the Martyr Abbasian clinic opened in January 2019, a separate gate was opened to connect it directly to the external street to receive civilian patients, and a dedicated car park was established, with no parking spaces for military personnel allowed when it was operational from the complex and gates three independent gates.

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Thus, what had been a simple unified military complex became three independent sections, which is consistent with satellite imagery. The Shajareh Tayyebeh girl school, separated under a new internal wall, adjacent to the Martyr Abbasian Specialised Clinic, which was separated from the Sayyid al-Shohada military complex, which remained a closed and active site.

When the US-Israeli attack began on the morning of February 28, 2026, analysts of the other locations revealed an odd pattern. Missiles hit the military site and the school, but bypassed the specialised clinic complex located between the two without touching it.

This exclusion cannot be explained as a coincidence. It strongly indicates that the operating parts was operating with coordinates and maps that distinguished between the complex's different facilities.

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This video from the Tasnim Iranian news channel, filmed from a nearby hill, shows the school's gate and wall, and provides all relevant details.

The Martyr Abbasian clinic as corroborating evidence

The given that the attacking party may not (would have been) aware of the clinic's updated layout, we traced the most construction projects in the same area.

On January 14, 2019 (just one year before the attack), the commander-in-chief of the IRGC, Hossein Salami, inaugurated the Martyr Abbasian Specialised Clinic, related the site of Minab to inaugurate the Martyr Abbasian Specialised Clinic.

The clinic, which cost one billion Iranian tomans (about $20m), was built on an area of 1,500 square meters (16,145 square feet) at another corner of the same original military complex – specifically on Rondak Street – to serve residents of nearby Hormuz port province.

Reports published to cover the clinic's opening indicate it was equipped with the latest IT imaging devices, ultrasound equipment, and laboratories, and that it offered cardiac medical specialties such as pediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, and dentistry, confirming its civilian nature.

The adjacent