

Over 1,000 dead as Western-backed HTS regime in Syria escalates massacre of Alawites

Hakan Özal
9 March 2025

In Syria, the Western-backed Haiat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) regime's massacre of Alawites has escalated, with over 1,000 people killed.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that armed groups affiliated with the HTS regime have killed at least 745 civilians, including women and children, in the coastal region since Thursday. The brutality of the killings was demonstrated by the bodies being left in the streets as a warning.

HTS jihadist terror against Alawites and other religious minorities is not new. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has reported, these attacks have been systematic since it took power in Syria in December, toppling the regime of President Bashar al-Assad. In late December, the aggression of the regime forces led to mass protests.

According to BBC reports, the violence began when residents of Beit Ana village in Latakia refused to hand over a suspect to security forces on Thursday and quickly spread to other coastal cities in the northwest. Armed groups composed of former Syrian army soldiers launched coordinated attacks on government checkpoints, security convoys, and military positions. In response, the interim government forces launched a large-scale operation.

By Saturday, SOHR was already reporting that at least 745 civilians, 148 insurgents, and 125 regime soldiers had been killed during the operation. Alawite men who served in the security forces during the Assad regime were executed by the new government forces, and many Alawite villages were looted and set on fire.

Jenan Moussa, *Al-Aan* TV's Middle East correspondent, shared footage on social media related to HTS militia's attacks in the Latakia region on Friday. The videos show severe violence against

individuals described by the Syrian regime as "remnants of the old regime," with most victims wearing civilian clothes. Moussa's footage revealed 29 men executed in the Al- Mokhtariyeh area and 11 in Al-Hafa.

The videos included sectarian insults and slogans. In one, an HTS supporter referred to the victims as "dead animals." Another showed a man in civilian clothes and slippers being shot at close range.

SOHR is an anti-Assad organisation funded by the UK Foreign Office and other European powers. Its director, Rami Abdulrahman, was imprisoned three times in Syria before fleeing to the UK. He stated that the widespread massacres in areas with dense Alawite populations, such as Jableh, Baniyas, and surrounding regions, are among the worst violence in the 14-year civil war. Abdulrahman emphasized, "This is not about being pro or against the former Assad regime. These are sectarian massacres that aim to expel the Alawite population from their homes."

On Saturday, social media platforms were filled with photos and condolence messages from Syrian users regarding those killed in the coastal region. Reuters spoke to six residents who reported that thousands of Alawites and Christians fled their homes due to safety concerns since Thursday. Many, mostly women, children, and the elderly, were forced to seek refuge at the Russian military base in Hmeymim, Latakia.

Abdulrahman noted that Alawite civilians, including women and children, were "executed," and their homes and property looted. He reported that killings, looting, and arson continued throughout the night in Baniyas and surrounding villages as of Saturday.

Aron Lund from the independent research foundation Century International told AFP, "The authority [of the new regime] is based largely on radical jihadists who

consider the Alawites to be enemies of God.” Lund added, “When there is an attack, these groups then carry out raids of Alawite villages, which don’t just include armed former soldiers but also vulnerable civilians.”

The Syrian state news agency SANA cited an unnamed security official stating that many fighters went to the coastal regions to avenge attacks against security forces.

Allegations suggest that HTS-affiliated groups, the successor organisation of the al-Nusra Front—which was formerly allied with al-Qaeda—have made calls in mosques stating that “killing Alawites is obligatory.” There are videos supporting these allegations on social media.

Al Jazeera’s correspondent in Damascus, Resul Serdar, reported on Saturday afternoon that the intensity of clashes had significantly decreased, although fighting continued in the outskirts of towns. Serdar emphasized the growing “tragedy” due to increasing casualties, noting, “Hundreds of people have been killed and the majority of them are civilians.”

BBC Verify confirmed the authenticity of two videos showing a corpse being dragged through the streets in Latakia.

A Syrian activist in Latakia told *BBC Newshour* that the violence has instilled great fear in the Alawite community. The activist, who wished to remain anonymous, said, “They are feeling so fearful... They don’t know what to do. There is no government or state who is ready to help them, to protect them.”

Curfews were imposed in Homs, Latakia, and Tartus, where Alawites are densely populated, while the governor of Latakia announced ongoing power outages in the region.

HTS leader Abu Muhammad al-Jolani (Ahmed al-Sharaa), declared “interim president” after the regime change, defended the massacre in a video message, stating, “Remnants of the ousted regime tried to test the new Syria without understanding it, and today they are relearning Syria.” Al-Jolani stated, “Prisoners should not be humiliated or beaten, as this is against God’s command and the country’s laws,” in order to avoid putting NATO allies in a difficult position.

While the NATO powers, including Turkey, have largely remained silent on the bloody aggression of their new ally, the HTS regime, some of the statements

made are an example of utter hypocrisy.

“I am deeply shocked by the numerous victims in the western regions of Syria,” Stefan Schneck, Germany’s special envoy to Syria, said on X. Michael Ohnmacht, the European Union’s envoy to Syria, retweeted Schneck’s post, adding, “I share the opinion of my German counterpart regarding the call for all parties to exercise restraint.”

The NATO powers and their pseudo-left advocates, who claim that Islamist jihadists hostile to basic democratic rights have led a “democratic revolution” in Syria, share responsibility for these massacres. They hailed the coming to power last December of the Islamists they had backed since 2011 in the war for regime change, in order to undermine Russian and Iranian influence in Syria and the broader Middle East, and rushed to cement their ties with the new regime.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact