

Al-Qaeda-rooted HTS regime escalates its oppression of the Alawite minority in Syria

Hakan Özal**11 January 2026**

Following the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in December 2024 in an imperialist-backed regime change war, the Damascus government led by Al-Qaeda-rooted Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has escalated its crackdown on the Alawites, estimated to make up 10 percent of the population.

HTS, which has the support of Türkiye and the Gulf states, is simultaneously moving towards a security agreement with Israel under US auspices. The Islamist regime of former Al-Qaeda leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, who was hosted in Ankara last year and later at the White House, is completely incapable of resolving fundamental democratic and social issues and resorts to violent repression to consolidate its power.

At the same time, the bourgeois leaderships of various minorities are trying to secure a place within the new Syria through demands for autonomy. Druze forces, concentrated in the south, have significant support from Israel.

Kurdish forces in the north and east (Syrian Democratic Forces, SDF) rely on the military and political power they have gained as the main proxy of the US in the country. HTS is simultaneously conducting “integration” talks with the SDF and carrying out military operations against its forces.

The Arab Alawite population, concentrated along the country’s western coastline and in major cities, finds itself defenseless against the new regime’s naked violence. Integrated into the state during the Asad regime, they did not develop their own autonomous armed forces during the civil war. Now they face murders, bomb attacks, arbitrary arrests, and forced displacement.

Amid the Alawite population’s growing concerns for their safety, large numbers participated in the “peaceful human wave” protests on December 28 called by

Sheikh Ghazel Ghazal, head of the Supreme Alawite Islamic Council in Syria and the Diaspora. Demonstrations in Alawite-majority regions such as Latakia, Tartus, Homs, Hama, and the Ghab Plain featured demands to “stop the killings,” and for “justice,” and “federalism.”

Protests which began peacefully quickly turned into violent clashes after attacks by pro-regime groups and security forces. According to official figures, at least three people were killed and dozens injured. Following the events, regime forces imposed a curfew in Latakia and deployed military units to the city center.

The direct trigger for the protests was a bomb attack on the Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib Mosque in the Alawite-populated Wadi al-Dahab neighborhood of Homs on December 26, 2025.

The attack, which took place during Friday prayers, was claimed by Saraya Ansar al-Sunna, which split from HTS in February 2025. According to information reported in the international press, at least eight people were killed and 18 wounded. The terrorist organization, which attacked a Greek Orthodox church in Damascus on June 22, killing at least 25 people, advocates the elimination or expulsion of all non-Sunni in Syria.

After the fall of the Assad regime, Alawites, branded the “social base of the old regime”, became the target of systematic attacks backed by the regime. Attacks by the new regime’s security apparatus and sectarian militias became intertwined.

In March 2025, large-scale massacres were carried out against Alawites in the provinces of Latakia, Tartus, and Hama. According to an extensive investigation by Reuters, approximately 1,500 Alawite civilians were killed in over 40 settlements in just a few days. A significant portion of the killings took place when armed groups entered villages and

neighborhoods, going door to door, questioning people about their identity and sect, and then executing them. Women, children, and the elderly were not spared.

Reports published by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights revealed that these murders were targeted. According to witness statements, the attackers killed civilians after asking them, “Are you Alawite?” Homes were looted, vehicles were set on fire, and villages emptied. Amnesty International and United Nations agencies have explicitly defined these actions as “war crimes.”

These massacres were accompanied by a comprehensive campaign of repression aimed at crippling the Alawite population economically and socially. Tens of thousands of Alawite workers employed in the public sector, the army, and state-owned enterprises during the Assad period were dismissed by the new regime. These mass purges in key ministries such as defense, interior, and education were carried out without any legal process.

Alawites also faced mass evictions. According to reports, numerous Alawite families in Latakia, Homs, and Damascus were thrown from their homes by armed groups: their property was confiscated and their houses were effectively seized. Tens of thousands sought refuge in Lebanon and other neighboring countries; those who remained in coastal areas were condemned to live under threat of unemployment, food insecurity, and constant violence.

Official statements following murders and mass attacks aim not to identify the perpetrators and hold them accountable, but to shift the regime’s responsibility onto vaguely named “illegal elements” or “uncontrolled groups.”

Following the mass killings in coastal areas in March 2025, investigative commissions were established. Despite hundreds of witness statements and detailed documentation from international human rights organizations, they systematically ignored the role of security forces and did not touch high-level political and military officials. The policy of impunity not only covered up past crimes but also served as an open encouragement for new attacks.

Responsibility for the persecution of Alawites in Syria also lies with US-NATO imperialism and its regional allies, including Türkiye, which have supported Al-Qaeda-linked militias since 2011 and

brought them to power in 2024. Seeking to establish complete hegemony in the Middle East and eliminate the influence of Iran, Russia, and China, the US has carried out numerous military interventions in the region since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, encouraging sectarianism and provoking civil wars.

The genocide launched in Gaza in October 2023, the war waged against Hezbollah in Lebanon, regime change in Syria, the bombing of Yemen, and the imperialist-Zionist attack on Iran last June are part of the US drive to establish a “new Middle East” together with Israel. The HTS regime’s attack on the Alawites and the competition for power and influence in Syria, which has brought the regime to the brink of all-out war with the SDF, are a consequence of this broader imperialist war.

Workers of countless nationalities, religions, and sects across Syria and the Middle East can only resist this imperialist aggression by uniting *internationally* on a *class* basis. Democratic rights, safety, job security, lasting prosperity, and social equality can only be achieved through the rule of the working class and the abolition of the imperialist-capitalist system. This means fighting for a Socialist Federation of the Middle East under the leadership of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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