

Pro-government Turkish journalist calls for extermination of Syria's Arab Alawites

Hakan Özal
30 August 2026

Kemal Öztürk, the former director general of the Turkish state-owned Anadolu Agency (AA), said Thursday on NTV, one of Türkiye's largest national news channels, referring to the Arab Alawites of Syria: "You find yourself wanting to say that they would deserve it if every last one of these Nusayris were slaughtered." According to the description on his X account, he is a "political commentator" on NTV and a columnist for Al Jazeera.

Öztürk opened his remarks by declaring that at the Sednaya Prison near Damascus "even the street sweeper who worked there would deserve to be hanged or shot," and continued: "But look, [the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham regime] did not take revenge, they did not carry out those mass executions... That is why I consider the al-Sharaa government a success."

Öztürk's words do not merely deny the massacres carried out against the Alawites by the HTS regime, established in December 2024 under the leadership of former Al Qaeda leader Ahmed al-Sharaa above all with the backing of the United States and Türkiye; they legitimize new ones. Such statements are an extension of the policy through which US imperialism and its regional allies have inflamed sectarian and ethnic divisions while drowning the Middle East in blood over the past 35 years.

Öztürk began his career in journalism at the Islamist daily *Yeni Şafak* and went on to work at Kanal 7, where in 1999 he produced the first documentary on Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, today's president. From 2003 he served as an adviser in the Office of the Speaker of the Turkish parliament; in 2008 he became an adviser to Erdoğan as chairman of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and subsequently served as Erdoğan's press adviser in the prime ministry. From August 2011 to December 2014, he was chairman of the board and

director general of AA. NTV, the channel on which he made his call for slaughter of Syrian Alawites, is a long-established news channel belonging to the media arm of the Doğu Group, one of Türkiye's largest conglomerates.

The claim that the new rulers "did not take revenge"—a whitewash of the Damascus regime and of the Syria policy of its principal patron, Ankara, as well as of US imperialism—is a bald lie. A months-long Reuters investigation established that 1,479 Alawites were killed between March 7 and 9, 2025 in more than 40 settlements along Syria's Mediterranean coast. The chain of command of the killers ran up to leading figures of the new regime in Damascus. To absolve the regime of responsibility, a handful of militiamen were charged and punished for show.

Armed groups entered homes, demanded that people state their sect and executed them on the basis of the answer; women, children and the elderly were not spared. In the period leading up to the massacres, calls that "killing the Alawites is a religious duty" were made in Idlib, Homs and Hama. Amnesty International and United Nations bodies have characterized these acts as war crimes.

Reuters documented that the Sultan Suleiman Shah (Amshat) and Hamza (Hamzat) divisions of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) took part in the killings at no fewer than eight separate locations, where some 700 people died. These militias, sanctioned by the United States and the European Union (EU) for human rights violations, also took part in the attacks on the Druze in Suwayda in July 2025. The forces that Öztürk claims "did not carry out mass executions" are precisely those that Ankara has financed and trained for years and deployed against Kurdish forces in the occupation zone in northern Syria stretching from Afrin

(Efrîn) to Ras al-Ayn (Serêkanî).

Alongside the massacres, tens of thousands of Alawite public sector workers have been dismissed without any legal process, families have been driven from their homes, and their property has been seized. Human Rights Watch has documented executions carried out on the basis of identity. After a bomb attack on a mosque in Homs in December 2025, protests that erupted in the coastal cities were suppressed by regime forces, and a curfew was declared in Latakia.

Since 2011, Washington, the Gulf monarchies and Ankara have systematically backed Al Qaeda-linked militias in order to topple President Bashar al-Assad, who was supported by Russia and Iran, and to install a pro-Western puppet regime. Following the regime change, al-Sharaa was received in Türkiye in February 2025 in his capacity as “interim president.” At the beginning of July 2026, he was again in Ankara as a guest of the NATO summit.

In August 2025, Ankara signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Joint Training and Consultancy with Damascus, and Syrian officers began to be trained in Türkiye. In January 2026, the military operation launched by Damascus against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led by Kurdish nationalists, was carried out with Ankara’s open support and a green light from Washington.

On Tuesday, August 25, at the presidential palace in Damascus, SDF General Commander Mazlum Abdi announced that the SDF was dissolving itself as an independent military force and integrating into the Syrian army. Abdi was rewarded with the post of adviser to al-Sharaa.

As part of its war preparations against Iran, the Trump administration adapted itself to the opposition of Ankara and the new Damascus regime to Kurdish demands for status and autonomy, and organized the incorporation of Syria, under HTS leadership, into the anti-Iranian axis. Al-Sharaa, on whose head Washington placed a US\$10 million bounty in 2017, was received at the White House in 2025.

While Öztürk’s remarks were directed against the Arab Alawites of Syria, this poisonous language has a direct significance within Türkiye itself. Although no official figures exist, a large Alawite (Alevi) population lives in the country, with estimates ranging from 10 million to 25 million.

Hundreds of thousands of Arab Alawites living in Hatay, Adana and Mersin have relatives in Syria. Türkiye’s recent history is filled with massacres in which language such as Öztürk’s was put into practice. In Mara? in 1978, after announcements that “killing them [Alawites] is a religious duty” were broadcast from the mosque in the city center, 111 people were killed, 559 houses were burned and roughly 290 businesses were destroyed, according to the indictment. In Çorum in 1980, 57 people were killed after announcements were made from mosques that “the communists are bombing the mosque.” In Sivas in 1993, 33 writers, poets and artists, together with two hotel employees, were burned to death at the Mad?mak Hotel.

Alawite organizations and the Kurdish Peoples’ Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party) have demanded that an investigation be opened into Öztürk. While no action has yet been taken against him, in the same week Gökay Çak?r, chairman of the Independent Miners’ Union (Ba??ms?z Maden-??), and the union’s organizing specialist Ba?aran Aksu were arrested on the alleged charge of “publicly inciting hatred and enmity” for defending the rights of miners.

Under conditions in which real wages are being eroded and political repression is escalating, in which military spending is rising while social spending is being cut, and in which workers’ struggles are met with detentions and arrests, the ruling class needs more than ever to divide and disorient the working class.

The only way forward against this imperialist-backed reactionary policy lies in uniting workers throughout the Middle East and internationally on a *class* basis, above and beyond all divisions of religion, sect and nationality. This means the fight for a Socialist Federation of the Middle East against imperialist war and the capitalist system.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact