



The Hidden Face Of Syria's New Regime

**Massacres of Alawites and Violence
against Druze**



Syrian is a mosaic of different peoples. Alone 20 different religious groups find themselves home on Syrian soil. Besides Arabs, Kurds, Druze and Alawites many different peoples exist in smaller numbers such as the Syriacs, Turkmens, Carcassians, Yazidis, Armenians and Jews. While this heterogeneity has been seen as a fortune, this wealth is increasingly under threat.

On the 27th December 2024 Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) with its leader Ahmed Hussein al-Sharaa toppled the Assad regime within days. For a short amount of time, hope existed that the end of the Assad family's reign would allow Syria to change its political system into a more democratic system that would do justice to the wealth of different nations. The idea of a Syria united in diversity, granting all peoples autonomy, was supported and promoted by many national groups and movements. One step into this direction was laid down in March 2025 in an agreement between Ahmed al-Sharaa and the general commander of QSD, Mazlum Abdi, in which rights of all Syrians to representation and participation in the political process and all state institutions regardless of their religious and ethnic backgrounds were stated.

Despite previous messages of inclusiveness and tolerance from the side of al-Sharaa, the new regime cannot hide their true mindset. Since 2017 HTS previously had established a de-facto jihadist totalitarian regime under the name "Syrian Salvation Government" in Idlib province, its stronghold. At latest with the first drafting of a constitution on 13th March 2025, it became clear that the new rulers are not interested in a diverse Syria but stick to their ideological line. Not only do they continue the nation-state doctrine of 'one country, one language, one nation' but strengthen its nationalist and authoritarian nature with jihadist ideas. The designation 'Syrian Arab Republic' remains in place and Arabic is to be the only official language. Furthermore only a Muslim can be considered as head of state. Freedom of religion has been confirmed, but only the heavenly religions Christianity, Islam and Judaism are protected. The basis of legislation continues to be Islamic jurisprudence, with a small but far-reaching change. Islamic jurisprudence is now "the main source of legislation", rather than "a main source", like it was under al-Assad. During the transitional government, the end of which is not in sight, only the self-appointed president is to exercise executive power. Completely lacking from the current constitutional draft are rights of women and autonomous self-defense.



2019, woman in Idlib province demanding the release of her husband from a prison under HTS-rule.

- December 2024: HTS announces the "Syrian Caretaker Government" with Mohammed al-Bashir, previously prime minister of the 'Syrian Salvation Government' in Idlib, as prime minister
- 29th January 2025: After serving as de-facto leader, al-Sharaa announces himself as president of Syria and dissolves HTS. Its militias as well as parts of the Syrian National Army (SNA), are to be the Syrian security forces.
- 13th March: Interim constitution is signed enshrining a 5-year transition period.
- 29th March: al-Sharaa announces new transitional government





Al-Sharaa and Anas Khattab, both founders of the al-Nusra Front (al-Qaida's Syria affiliate). Khattab also took a leading role in HTS and is now Minister of Interior.

The mentality that the new regime wants to hide behind its suits and official appearance especially came to light in the massacres of Alawite people in March 2025 and attacks on Druze people in May 2025. This violence is ongoing. Such attacks indicate that in order to create a monopoly of military and political processes in Syria, they do not shy away from massacring peoples that organise autonomously or are considered as infidel such as the Druze or the Alawites.

The official appointment of militia leader Ahmad Ihsan Fayyad Al-Hayes as commander of the 86th Division, to be in charge of Raqqa, Heseke and Deir e-zor, shows the unchanged mentality of the new regime, however democratic it may

claim to be. As leader of one militia of the Turkish-backed SNA, Ahmad Ihsan Fayyad Al-Hayes has been accused of war crimes in Afrin and against the Yezidi people. He also took part in the brutal murder of the Secretary General of the Future Syria Party, Hevrîn Xelef. Such a man at the head of a division shows more than clearly the true face of the new regime. Above all, a cooperation between the different national groups is to be prevented as the powers in Damascus fear most the organisation of Syria's democratic powers. The clothes and the language of the representatives of the new regime may have changed but the mentality behind their performance is still a jihadist mentality of bloodshed and Sharia law. This becomes visible in the increased number of attacks against so called 'Western lifestyle' such as the attacks on night clubs in Damascus or the increasing number of fully veiled women who are send out to propagate Sharia life. The governemnt is overall strenghtening the ground for jihadist groups and movements.

How is a goverment and a man who is not even shaking the hands of women supposed to be able to take women rights into account? How can the natural leadership of women develop if the head of the newly created Women's Affairs Office, Aisha al-Dibs, insists on the modern role of women as housewives. How are women supposed to find their true strength when their history is being erased - such as the legacy of queen Zenobiya taken from school curriculum? In order to destroy and weaken society it is needed to keep women outside of political participation. Excluding women and killing minorities are part of an overall agenda to destroy a free and diverse life.

Some might think that the attacks on the Druze and Alewives are exceptions or the 'bad guys' among the militias. However Damascus' official policies and the attacks on national minorities are two methods following the same goal: a homogeneous state under the sole leadership of the "former" jihadist militias.

Central to all this is al-Sharaa claims to represent the entirety of the Syrian state and its people, backed by governments worldwide. Al-Sharaa and his militias seek to solidify their control by including their allies in military and political structures of the system they are building up in the name of the Syrian state and fighting those who seek a democratic system that does the wealth of Syria justice.



The official face of the 'Transitional Government'. At least seven of the minister previously held leading positions in al-Nusra, HTS and their Sharia authority in Idlib.





Murders in the new regime

Top: Former militia member Haris al-Ribah, director of the Digital Media Department in Deir ez-Zor media Directorate; On the right filming the murder of Hevrin Xelef¹

Left: The bullet-ridden car of Hevrin Xelef. On 12th October 2019 on the M4 highway the Ah-rar al-Sharqiya militia shot the car, murdered the driver and later also Hevrin Xelef.

Left:
Ahmad Ihsan
Fayyad Al-Haye
known as "Abu
Hatem Shaqra"
posing with two
civilians who were
killed shortly after
the photo, on the
same day in the
same location as
Hevrin Xelef;

Right: Hevrin
Xelef, previously
Secretary General
of the Future
Syria Party



The coastal region of Syria, Latakia and Tartous province, are home to a majority of Alawite people and have historically also been the stronghold of the Assad regime. When on 06.03.2025 pro-Assad forces attacked Syrian Transitional Governments (STG) security forces, these attacks were used as a pretext to massacre thousands of Alawite civilians in the weeks that followed. While the unreported numbers are likely much higher, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports of 1,659 civilian casualties and 532 casualties among fighters from both sides in the time from 06.03.2025-27.03.2025² alone. Arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial executions, raids of entire families were reported from people on the ground. Further the U.N. estimated that around 51.000 people were displaced by the violence, with 30.000 of these crossing into neighboring Lebanon³⁴.

Al-Shaara initially declared on 7th March that “the time for forgiveness is over” and that “the stage of purification” has begun. Following international condemnation, the STG announced the establishment of a special commission to investigate and bring perpetrators to justice. According to RIC “the credibility of the committee’s work is questionable because it is appointed by the new authorities, who are affiliated with the perpetrators”⁵.

Shortly after, on the 28th April fighting erupted in Suweyda province in Syria’s south as militias took a provocative video as a pretext to attack the Druze community. While the STG reported it responded to “outlaw groups” reports from the Druze community on the ground spoke

of raids and looting as well as killing of civilians⁶. At least 10 civilians were reported killed, next to 35 Druze gunmen and 30 members of the STG security forces and their allied militias⁷. Because of having their own armed defense militias

the Druze attempted to defend themselves.

As violence is ongoing all over Syria, there have also been reports of the disappearance and kidnapping of women and children. In March it was reported that eye-witnesses from the coastal region claimed more than 100 individuals, especially Alawite women and children had been kidnapped. In May it was reported that over 50 Alawite women were kidnapped and enslaved/ ‘sold’ in Idlib. Women are also disappearing. One such case is that of a woman who disappeared and after two weeks returned with the new regime’s police and a man, claiming voluntarily left to marry him. As a woman that previously did not veil, she returned veiled in Afghan clothes and with brand-marks on her hands⁸⁹¹⁰.

Attacks on the Alawites and Druze



A woman named Zerka standing next to the corpses of her sons in Latakia province, being told by armed men that they will kill all Alawites, dated 13.03.2025.¹¹



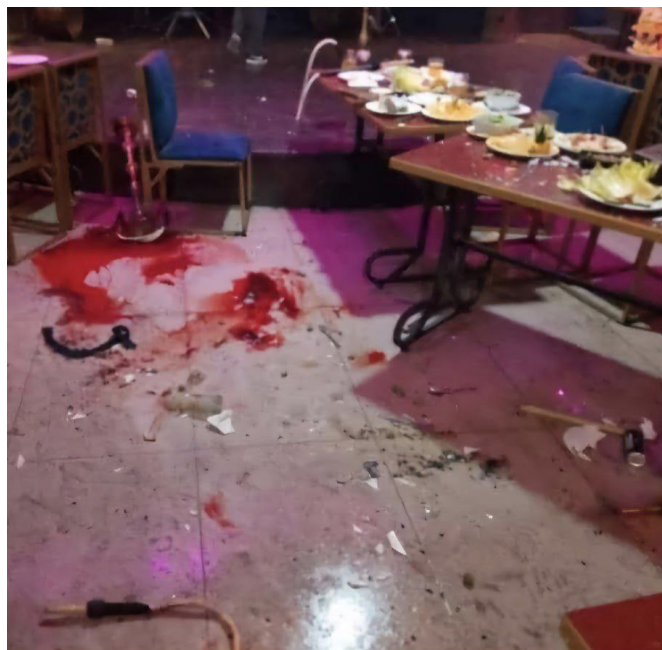
Satellite image of the Hmeimim air base in Syria to which hundreds of Alawites fled. Photo by Maxar Technologies.





Top:
Satellite image from 15th March 2025 showing 29 bodies of Alawites buried in two mass graves in Sanobar village, Latakia province. The image from Maxar Technologies were cross-checked by a team from CNN which reports that this is one of several examples.¹³

Right:
Attack on Al-Karawan nightclub in Damascus on 5th May 2025 in which one woman working at the nightclub was killed. This incident followed another attack on the nightclub Layila al-Sharq some days earlier.¹⁴¹⁵



Left:
The young Alawite women Mira Jalal Thabet (22) from Tal Khalak near Homs disappeared for 2 weeks. When she returned she was veiled in Afghan clothes, had brand marks on her hand. She arrived in the presence of a man and police forces. She stated to have voluntarily married and left again. In social media this case was widely discussed. 09.05.2025¹²





Top:
A boy looks at a destroyed car following sectarian clashes against Druze people in Ashrafiyat Sahnaya near Damascus on May 1, 2025¹⁶.



Left:
Funeral of seven Druze people who were killed at the end of April¹⁷

Sources:

Cover <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/20/world/middleeast/syria-alawite-massacre.html>

1

2 <https://www.syriahr.com/en/359032/>

3 <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/03/17/middleeast/syria-massacre-alawite-minority-intl-invs/index.html>

4 <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/unicef-syria-flash-update-no-2-violence-coastal-areas-6-march-2-april-2025>

5 <https://rojavainformationcenter.org/2025/03/from-idlib-to-damascus/>

6 <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/slv9bkogxx>

7 <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20250501-syria-monitor-says-15-druze-fighters-killed-in-ambush-near-damascus>

8 <https://www.syriahr.com/en/360201/>

9 <https://thecradle.co/articles/syrias-stolen-daughters-the-hts-campaign-to-enslave-alawite-women>

10 <https://www.thecanary.co/global/world-analysis/2025/04/28/kidnappings-alawite-women-syria/>

11 <https://t.me/tvronahi/83049>

12 <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1459560/mira-the-forcibly-or-consensually-married-student-a-reflection-of-a-torn-syrian-society.html>

13 <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/03/17/middleeast/syria-massacre-alawite-minority-intl-invs>

14 <https://apnews.com/video/bar-patrons-in-damascus-are-fearful-after-recent-attacks-9f5f3ecb-338f4a79a1ba35b1d250df96>

15 <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2599619/middle-east>

16 <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2025/05/syria-druze-leader-decries-genocidal-attack-clashes-leave-101-dead>

17 <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2025/05/syrias-druze-take-arms-defend-their-town-against-islamists>

18 <https://shafaq.com/en/World/Alawite-Council-issues-ultimatum-to-new-Syrian-authorities-threatens-action-over-demands>



Who are the Alawite?

The Alawite people are fragmented across various nation states. In Syria, they make up approximately 10-12 per cent of the population, i.e. around 3 - 3.5 million people. They live mainly in the coastal provinces Latakia, Tartus, the rural areas of Hama and Homs, the western part of Idlib and, to a much lesser extent, in Damascus and Aleppo. The Alawite people are part of Shia Islam, even if they diverge from it to a considerable extent. They are a closed community that does not practise its faith in public. As a minority, they were subjected to constant persecution leaving them rather marginalised and poor. Under the Ba'ath regime and thus under the rule of the Assad family, who themselves belong to the Alawite people, their situation did not change much. However, it has increased tensions between the Sunni majority of Syria, ruled by an Alawite family. In the despotic regime, extended family members were given power positions and in late years the regime attempted to base its military force on Alawites. The Alawites itself remained however overall marginalised and neglected community that did not managed to organise as a people seeking autonomy.



Syrian Islamic Alawite Council protests on 24th February 2025.¹⁸



Suweyda military council announced on 24th February 2025 in which 62 of over 160 armed groups united.

Who are the Druze?

The majority of the Druze people (500,000-700,000 people) live in Syria. They mainly live in Suweida and Daraa (Jabal ad-Duruz) as well as in areas near the Israeli border. There are various speculations and stories about the origin of the Druze. Druze are an Arab people and are considered part of Shiite Islam, even if their interpretations are often so different that they are sometimes referred to as a separate religion rather than part of Islam. They tend to keep their religious beliefs secret and maintain an inward-looking community structure, partly to protect themselves.

Their history is full of persecution and resistance. They are known as a warlike people. It is said that “they rarely raise their flag, but when they do, they do it with a strong stand”. They have already resisted the rule of the Ottoman Empire, the French occupation and the Baath regime alongside the Arab armed forces. From 1918 they achieved independence and in 1921 they established the State of Suweida and later changed to Emirate of Jabal ad-Duruz. After the independence of Syria in 1936, the Druze were incorporated into the Syrian state, but this did not put an end to their aspirations. After the fall of the Baath regime, they refused to submit to the rule of HTS and once again repeated their demands for autonomy.





In light of the recent developments in Syria particularly following Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's (HTS) seizure of power and the overthrow of the Ba'athist Syrian regime we observe that the conflict in Syria has deepened, descending further into widespread chaos. This jihadist regime and its extremist ideology have perpetrated massacres and acts of genocide against our people in the Syrian coastal regions. Today, we witness this same oppressive force launching brutal assaults against our Druze community with equal ferocity.

Yet, our Druze people represent an ancient and honorable community, just like all the other components of Syrian society, and they have long struggled for their freedom and independence. HTS, with its authoritarian and oppressive mentality, seeks to subjugate the deeply rooted peoples of this land, such as the Alawites and Druze, deliberately sowing sectarian conflict and fueling tensions among the diverse communities of the region. By doing so, they aim to exploit these divisions in pursuit of their notorious strategy of "divide and rule."

Recent events have further exposed the grave danger posed by this jihadist ideology not only to the peoples of Syria but to women in particular. A regime that rejects the rich diversity of peoples and faiths can never be a model for governance in Syria. Historically, Syria has been a homeland where diverse communities have coexisted on the same land. This diversity must never be a pretext for genocide or persecution; rather, it should be a wellspring for freedom of thought, expression, and coexistence.

In truth, Syria has endured the unspeakable horrors of a prolonged and bloody war. The peoples of this region are exhausted by this destruction and yearn to live freely and with dignity on their own land. However, the jihadist mentality categorically rejects Syria's social mosaic, thus obstructing any path toward rebuilding a democratic, pluralistic Syria. Moreover, democracy cannot take root in a system dominated by patriarchal and authoritarian rule.

The model capable of leading Syria into a just and peaceful future is the Democratic Nation model whose achievements can already be witnessed in the reality of North and East Syria (Rojava), where all communities have been able to express their identities and live freely in harmony and mutual respect.

As the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), we categorically condemn these terrorist crimes committed against our Druze and Alawite peoples, who are an integral part of Syria's social fabric. We stand firmly against all forms of systematic terrorist aggression that target human values and threaten the unity of Syrian society. We believe that self-defense is the primary and indispensable guarantee for building a free and democratic society.

We affirm that only women possess the vision and strength to lead Syria through this critical juncture, steering the region toward stability and security. At the same time, we can construct a future Syria that is democratic and secure, guided by the ethical and aesthetic consciousness of women, a consciousness that stands in direct opposition to the dominant, violent, patriarchal mentality.

On this basis, we call upon all peoples especially women to embrace the principle of self-defense as a means to protect their rights and the rights of all communities, for self-defense is a natural and legitimate right for every people. Women across the region and around the world must shoulder their historic responsibility to their peoples, and together, we must escalate our struggle to strengthen unity and organization.

Once again, we reaffirm our commitment to building a free and dignified life through collective struggle and shared consciousness. We declare that the only viable solution for Syria lies in establishing a participatory society shaped by the organized will and leadership of women. In response to the massacres committed against our Syrian people, our greatest act of resistance will be to embrace the mission of legitimate self-defense with conscious, organized resolve and to realize a democratic Syria that welcomes all peoples and women in peace, dignity, and freedom.

General Command of the Women's Protection Units (YPJ)

04.05.2025





"Genuine respect for identities, their free expression and democratic organization, along with the socio-economic and political structures on which each segment relies, can only be realized within a truly democratic society and political framework."

Abdullah Öcalan
Call for Peace and Democratic Society (2025)



YPJ Information & Documentation Office

Web: www.ypj-info.org

Email: contact@ypj-info.org

Twitter: @YPJ_Info

Bluesky: [ypj.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/ypj.bsky.social)

Telegram: t.me/YPJInformation