

# Syrian voices respond to Democracy Now!'s one-sided coverage of dirty war

As the former leader of Syrian Al Qaeda turned Syrian president visits the United States, two members of targeted Syrian minority communities -- the Alawites and the Druze -- respond to one-sided coverage of the dirty war and even outright sectarian incitement aired on the progressive news show Democracy Now!. Guests: Dr. Morhaf Ibrahim, head of the Alawite Association of the United States. Hibbah Jarmakani, a Druze Syrian-American originally from Suweida province in Syria. Full interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKDmAmuWc0k> ||| The Grayzone ||| Find more reporting at <https://thegrayzone.com> Support our original journalism at Patreon: <https://patreon.com/grayzone> Facebook: <https://facebook.com/thegrayzone> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/thegrayzonenews> Instagram: <https://instagram.com/thegrayzonenews> Minds: <https://minds.com/thegrayzone> Mastodon: <https://mastodon.social/@thegrayzone> #TheGrayzone

## #Aaron

What you will hear from supporters of regime change in Syria is that the Alawite community was complicit in the crimes of the Assad government and the repression that occurred under Assad's rule. Here, for example, is Lina Sinjab. She's a Syrian reporter for the BBC, and she was on Democracy Now! earlier this year after what was described as the successful regime change in Syria. This is what she said about the Alawite community in Syria. I want to get your response.

## #Reporter

Because the Alawite community are worried about prosecution. Most of the Alawite community are supportive of President Assad or former President Assad, and they had contributed to or been part of the crackdown—the brutal crackdown on the Syrians: arrest, torture in prison, and killing. So they will be prosecuted, and that's why they are out and about trying to put pressure so there will be a general amnesty for the Alawite community. This is something that is impossible to happen because the families of those who died in prison, the families of those who were bombed and tortured to death or disappeared, they need justice. They need answers about what happened to their family members. And there is no way for peace and stability to happen in Syria without, you know, prosecution, without a legal system that will hold those who have blood on their hands accountable for the sake of reconciliation in the country. I wanted to ask you—

## #Aaron

So what's your response to that? She's basically saying that most of the Alawite community was involved in the brutal crackdown on Syrians by the Syrian government throughout the years, doing the dirty work.

## **#Guest1**

According to the UN investigation report that followed the massacres against Alawites on March 7, some of the victims were less than one year old. So these babies were supposedly part of the regime and involved in the atrocities of the Assad regime against people? How about the 55 women that we documented, some of them 16, 17, or 18 years old? During the massacre against Alawites on March 7, 2025, they separated women from men and killed them just based on their identity. Some of these women were actually killed because they were trying to protect their children, their sons. So are these people part of the Assad regime and complicit in the atrocities against Syrians with the Assad regime? In fact, 85% of the Assad regime fighters were from the Sunni, Kurds, Druze, and Christians. So the Assad regime was a dictatorship.

It was not an Alawite regime. Assad was Alawite himself, but he was married to a Sunni woman. The main security forces around him—the Minister of Defense was Sunni. Ali Mamlouk, his right-hand security official, is Sunni. A number of people around him were Sunni. So it was not really Alawite atrocities; it was just a dictatorial regime, a bad regime. And I'm really unhappy about this kind of media and this kind of reporting, because the same news outlets and the same reporters trying to link Alawites with the atrocities of the Assad regime are really affecting what's going on right now on the ground. The Assad regime was a dictatorship. The current regime is a dictatorship. Alawites have nothing to do and had nothing to do with the Assad regime. It was a dictatorship. It was a military regime. It was Al-Baath, a bad regime, similar to Saddam Hussein's.

And the regime did what it had to do at that time to protect itself. It has nothing to do with the Alawites. I'm so sorry to hear things like that because it's really affecting the survival of the Alawites in the region. Considering the Alawites as remnants of the Assad regime is really affecting their survival. I'm so sorry to hear things like that, because that's what's really making the killing of Alawites seem acceptable. Guess what? Look what happened to the Druze. Assad was not a Druze; they killed Druze because they are different. So the whole issue of killing right now in Syria is just some radical Sunni people—part of this current Sunni regime—trying to have Sunni dominance by killing and ethnically cleansing all other minorities.

## **#Aaron**

And I have to say, if we're going to talk about the atrocities that the Assad government carried out during the dirty war, it was because they were fighting back against one of the most well-armed insurgencies in history, dominated by groups like Al-Qaeda that were killing minorities, including Alawites, Druze, and Christians. And when you have an Al-Qaeda-dominated insurgency, and it's

very well-funded, you're going to have a lot of killing. So the answer was to stop the dirty war. But the policy was regime change, and the regime change was the product of states like the US and the UK. And this is a reporter from the BBC, which is an arm of the UK government that was a cheerleader for the dirty war. And that's really important context to understand here as you listen to this clip. I want to play one more from her. This is BBC reporter Lina Sinjab, also on the progressive show Democracy Now!, talking more about Alawites and basically saying that they're all essentially tools of Iran.

## **#Reporter**

and its affiliated militias, whether in Iraq or in Lebanon—from Hezbollah or the Shiite militias in Iraq—they're worried about them interfering in society, causing disruption and instability, especially since many of the Alawites and the Shia in Syria have always been affiliated with foreign powers like Iran, and they are worried that this is going to continue. Lina Sinjab, thank you so much for being with us.

## **#Aaron**

So the claim there is that most of the Alawites and the Shia are affiliated with Iran.

## **#Guest1**

That's not accurate. Alawites are very educated, very secular people, and they're really not religious at all. The regime was using its ties with Hezbollah and with Iran to protect itself. It was not really an Alawite issue to have some kind of alliance between the previous regime and these forces. And there's really no ties between Alawites and Hezbollah or Alawites and Iran. If you look at the behavior of Alawites right now, they are very well-educated, westernized people. Most of them are in the coastal area of Syria, with some around Damascus, Homs, and Hama. But all of them are educated.

They're really not religious people, and there's really no relationship or ties between Alawites themselves. And this is part of the confusion: the previous regime, with Bashar Assad being an Alawite himself, had its ties with Iran to protect itself, had its ties with Hezbollah to protect itself. Look at the Alawites in Lebanon right now—they have nothing to do with Hezbollah forces at all. So we really try to educate everybody that linking Alawites to outside forces such as Iran, or even Russia or Hezbollah, is really a mistake, and that should change. There's a huge difference between linking Al-Qaeda or linking HTS, or Jolani himself, with Turkish intelligence and the help that he got from Turkish intelligence as well as Turkish forces.

But the Alawites themselves are peaceful people. They have nothing to do with all these agendas in the Middle East—against, God forbid, Israel or any other forces. They really want to live in peace and govern themselves. And this is why decentralization is going to be the way to go. If you generalize by saying all Alawites or most Alawites are pro-nizam, or remnants of the Assad regime,

or that they really would like to have ties with Hezbollah or Iran, it's just a huge mistake—and it's a lethal mistake—because it's really affecting the existence of these people.

## **#Aaron**

Prior to Assad being overthrown, critics of the regime change war there—which cost the U.S. and its allies a lot of money; they spent billions of dollars arming an insurgency that they knew was dominated by al-Qaeda with weapons—criticism of the regime change operation would be met with claims like, "Listen to Syrian voices. This is what Syrians want." What I and others would argue is that Syria is not a monolith. Like every country, there's no unified voice. I'm just curious: what is your reaction to this characterization of most Syrians as wanting regime change in Syria and supporting the insurgency led by al-Qaeda that carries on?

## **#Guest2**

I mean, I think it's completely false. To claim most Syrians—like you said, Syrians are not a monolith. We all have our unique experiences. Even within the Druze community itself, you had conflicting voices: some people wanted Assad gone and some people didn't, which resulted in the Druze having a very interesting relationship with the previous government that sort of balanced on a kind of neutrality—not being completely against the previous government, but also not fully supporting it either. You had defectors within the Druze community who didn't want to join and fight in the Syrian army at that time, and you had people who were still serving and proud to serve. I'd say in any town in Syria, you could find both opinions. There was never a "most Syrians."

And I think the idea that "most Syrians" comes from the U.S.'s longstanding foreign policy of trying to create this image in countries that they're bringing democratization, and that the Syrian voice is one voice and we're all calling for the same thing. They've done this in many countries. Unfortunately, with Syria, it became so convoluted with all of these different groups and countries having involvement in that war—which I wouldn't even characterize as a civil war—that it created mixed messages. And it's one of those few examples where even on the left, and even in traditionally liberal media such as Democracy Now!, you have people reporting that very, very one-sided voice: "This is a dictator. We need to remove him." Anything that goes contrary to that messaging...

Oh, you're an Assadist. You love dictators, which was not the case. A lot of us who were standing against that and didn't want foreign involvement in Syria were precisely fearing what has transpired. Now you have a government that is run by a man who was the head of al-Qaeda in Syria and then worked as a prominent leader in ISIS, in Jabhat al-Nusra, that later became Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which was designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. He had a bounty on his head by the U.S. that was later lifted when suddenly he was wearing suits and was no longer a terrorist. And he's

incorporated all of these extremist elements into his defense ministry. And in addition to that, we have to look at the context of Syria, which has been a geopolitically important country since its inception, since it gained independence.

I mean, even in the 1940s, you had the U.S. already injecting money into the country through the Muslim Brotherhood to orchestrate coups against non-aligned governments—governments that weren't pro-Western—and the claim was that they were communist, that we needed to remove these leaders from Syria because they were pro-communist or pro-Soviet Russia. But the truth is, there was no strong communist leadership in Syria at that time. And the only reason we aligned ourselves with the Soviets at that time was because we saw the threat of the West. We were given no other choice. And you had a couple of things going on in the '40s and '50s.

I mean, in the '50s, Ben-Gurion developed his doctrine of periphery, where he utilized non-Arab allies or ethnic minorities to combat pan-Arab nationalism, turning public opinion and raising arms against the predominant power at the time. And in the '40s and '50s, you had the recently successful coup in Iran, orchestrated by the CIA, and they thought they could do the same in Syria. You had all these different people trying to overthrow the government of Syria, which resulted in a series of successive coups, one after the other, until we had a period of political stability under Hafez al-Assad. So that's the context in which we're looking at Syria—I mean, billions of dollars injected into a country to try and turn it more pro-West.

## **#Aaron**

On top of crippling sanctions that further destroyed the economy, made it impossible to rebuild, and a U.S. military occupation that plundered Syria's oil and wheat. So, you know, it's no wonder that regime change finally succeeded after destroying a country, stealing its resources, and preventing it from rebuilding. And I have to say, on the issue of media—progressive media—you know, you mentioned Democracy Now! and their very one-sided coverage. What I find really notable and unfortunate is that many of the outlets that cheerleaded regime change have ignored the consequences, have ignored, for example, the massacres against the Druze. I don't think Democracy Now! has even covered that in a segment. I think there's a responsibility there to at least cover the atrocities that bad media coverage helps set the stage for.