

Distinguished Members of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom,

My name is Jamil Ammar. I am a Canadian Syrian academic and Druze activist. Originally, I am from a small village in Mount Hermon, Damascus countryside. My village was controlled by an extremist group in 2013. My family's four-story house was used as a Sharia court for five years before being destroyed, looted, and burned to the ground. I fled Syria and have since settled in Canada. For me and my extended family, the latest violent events in Sweida represent a second wave of violence and atrocities against my people. Over the years, my focus shifted strongly to research on extremist groups, especially the so-called Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, and similar recently emerged groups. To date, nearly 80% of my research revolves around analyzing these groups; I monitor their online activities in Arabic, translate their communications into English, and study their performance in light of documented evidence and ideological documentation.

I am honored to provide testimony today on religious freedom in Syria's post-Assad transition. Below is a brief summary of my findings. I urge the Commission to review the full strategic policy brief ([Re-branding Extremism: A Data-Driven Case Study of HTS and Risks Implications for Religious Minorities in Syria](#)), which provides comprehensive documentation, evidence, and analysis to support the arguments presented here.

A Note on Methodology and Data Integrity

Deception and disinformation are among the most lethally effective tools employed by HTS and the Syrian Interim Government. For this reason, the authenticity and accuracy of information are of paramount importance. This strategic policy brief is grounded exclusively in documented evidence and data that we have systematically collected and rigorously analyzed. Our methodology employed AI-assisted analysis followed by three distinct rounds of verification, including two comprehensive manual reviews, to ensure the highest standards of accuracy. Every claim in this brief is supported by documented, verifiable evidence, which we possess and are prepared to provide upon request. Furthermore, readers are encouraged to independently verify the data themselves by accessing our live, interactive database [<https://syria-live-sectarian-database.netlify.app/>], which provides real-time documentation of hate speech and sectarian incitement.

Executive Summary

The international community's engagement with Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) is predicated on a dangerous assumption: that HTS is a cohesive actor committed to a stable, pluralistic Syria. The violent campaign against the Druze and Christian communities in Sweida exposes this as a fiction. The events in Sweida were not an isolated incident but the large-scale application of a repeatable playbook of state-sponsored sectarian violence, previously tested in smaller-scale attacks against the Druze in Jaramana and Sahnaya.

This playbook follows a consistent and cynical pattern:

1. Deception and Incitement: Each operation begins with a manufactured pretext—a disinformation campaign designed to ignite sectarian hatred. In Jaramana and Sahnaya (Druze stronghold), it was a fabricated story of a Bedouin woman who was assaulted by Druze men who removed her scarf. In Sweida, it was a fabricated video insulting the Prophet Muhammad, amplified by false rumors of Druze atrocities, including the killing of 200 Bedouin and rapping women. This initial spark is fanned into a wildfire through coordinated online hate speech that dehumanizes the target community.
2. State Disarmament and Proxy Violence: The Syrian government then employs a two-step process. First, official armed forces enter the area under the guise of "clearing weapons," effectively disarming

the local population. Immediately following, tribal proxies-officially sanctioned but deniable-are unleashed to commit the actual atrocities.

3. Indiscriminate Terror and Destruction: The ensuing violence is deliberately indiscriminate, targeting civilians, religious sites, and government supporters alike. The goal is to terrorize the entire community through mass killings, looting, and widespread destruction, as seen in the devastation of almost 30% of the Sweida Governorate.
4. Political Gamesmanship and Blame: Finally, in an act of supreme political gamesmanship, the state blames the victims for the violence, portraying them as separatists or outlaws who brought the destruction upon themselves, all while maintaining a facade of plausible deniability for the international community.

This strategy of weaponized sectarianism reveals a profound disconnect between HTS's projected image of moderation and its operational conduct. My full brief deconstructs this playbook, analyzes the extremist ideology that underpins it, and provides urgent policy recommendations for an international community on the verge of legitimizing a government that uses terror as a tool of statecraft.

I respectfully urge the Commission to review the complete strategic policy brief for comprehensive documentation, detailed case studies, and evidence-based policy recommendations. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Jamil Ammar