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Al-Qaeda Killed 19 Alawite Civilians After Seizing Syria Village

By Jason Ditz
May 13, 2016

A day after al-Qaeda's Nusra Front captured the western Syrian village of Zarra, reports are growing that the fears of violent recriminations against the territory's Alawite majority have borne true, with the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights confirming Nusra forces had killed at least 19 Alawite civilians, including six women, during raids on their homes.

The house-by-house raids across the village have included looting and the kidnappings of a number of Alawites across Zarra, and are part of what Nusra is calling a "revenge for Aleppo" offensive against Alawite territory in Syria.

Zarra's primary strategic value is because of its location near the main highway connecting the cities of Homs and Hama, and like many other otherwise unremarkable villages it has found itself turned into a major battleground as fighters aim to seize important supply routes.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is a member of Syria's Alawite minority, a branch of Shi'ite Islam. His connections to the Alawite community and the overwhelmingly Sunni nature of the rebellion has contributed to the sectarian nature of the civil war, and in many cases Alawite civilians have been attacked by rebels as presumptive allies to the government. Since they are constantly being attacked by the rebels, many indeed are sympathetic to the government, though in practice the religious leaders insist they are neutral.