



Cycle of Fear: Syria's Alawites in War and Peace

Leon Goldsmith

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In early 2011 an elderly Alawite shaykh lamented the long history of oppression and aggression against his people. Against such collective memories the Syrian uprising was viewed by many Alawites, and observers, as a revanchist Sunni Muslim movement and the gravest threat yet to the unorthodox Shi'a sub-sect. This explained why the Alawites largely remained loyal to the Ba'athist regime of Bashar al-Asad.

But was Alawite history really a constant tale of oppression and was the Syrian uprising of 2011 really an existential threat to the Alawites? This book surveys Alawite history from the sect's inception in Abbasid Iraq up to the start of the uprising in 2011. The book shows how Alawite identity and political behaviour have been shaped by a cycle of insecurity that has prevented the group from achieving either genuine social integration or long term security. Rather than being the gravest threat yet to the sect, the Syrian uprising, in the context of the Arab Spring, was quite possibly a historic opportunity for the Alawites to finally break free from their cycle of fear.

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