

THE
CARTER CENTER



Weekly Conflict Summary

April 12-18, 2018

A trilateral force including the US, UK, and France launched strikes against three military targets connected to the alleged chemical weapons attack in Duma the week before. These strikes do not appear to have led to any casualties despite the large volume of rockets launched. Experts and aid workers have been barred from entering Duma in the aftermath of a reported chemical weapons attack, largely due to Russian military police not allowing entry and pro-government militias creating an insecure environment for those entering the area. An impending pro-government offensive for Yarmouk Camp has not yet begun despite continuing troop deployment and media activity indicating an assault is imminent.

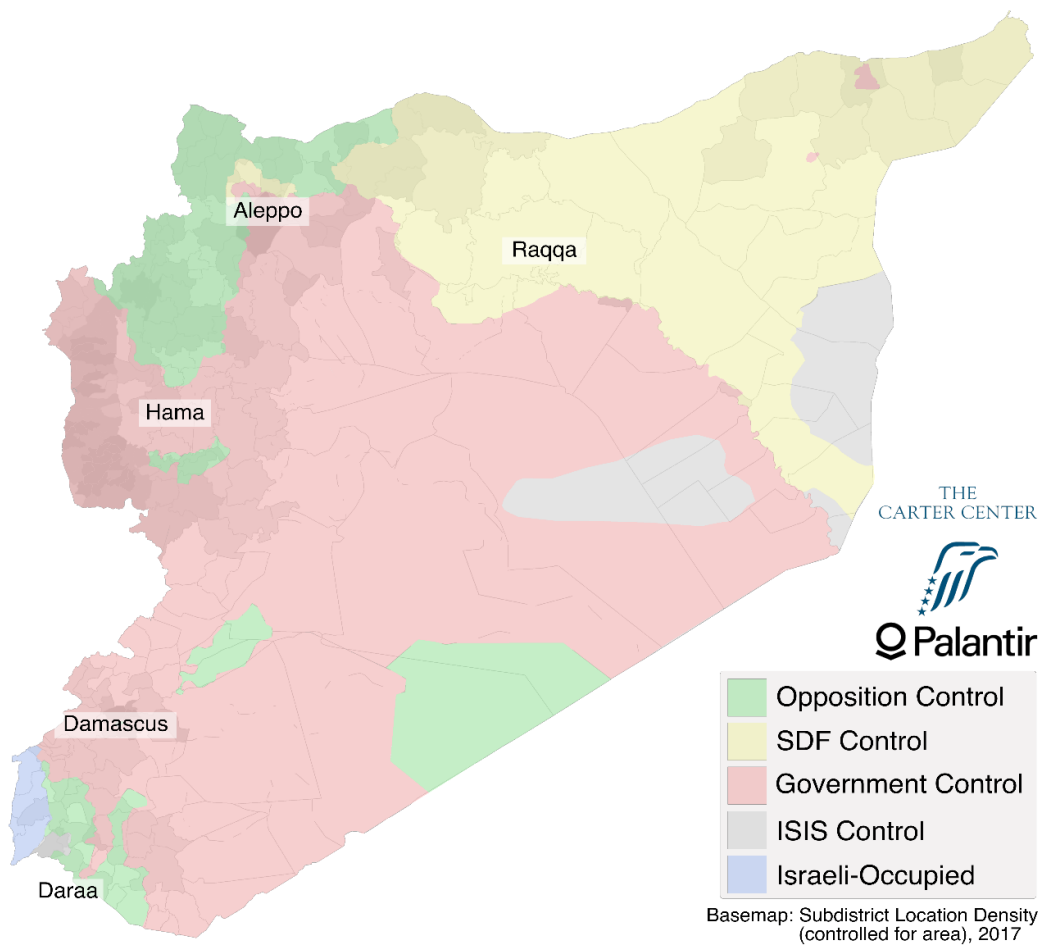


Figure 1 - Areas of control in Syria by April 18

Missile Strikes

After deliberations between officials of the US, UK, and France, strikes were carried out against Syrian military targets related to the alleged chemical attack on April 7. These strikes hit three military targets late at night between April 13 and 14, and have led to no reported casualties.

The strikes targeted the area of Barzeh on the outskirts of Damascus, Him Shinshar Chemical Weapons Storage Facility near Homs, and the Him Shinshar Chemical Weapons Bunker Facility, also near Homs. The US, UK, and France fired some 120 missiles against the three targets from warplanes and warships.

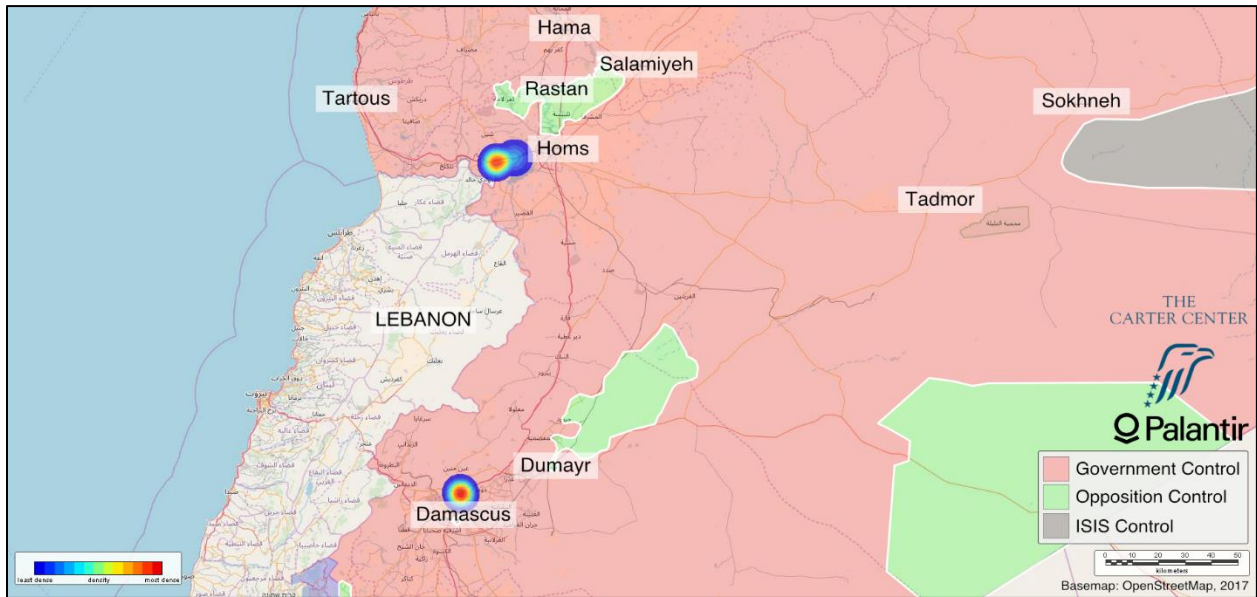


Figure 2 - Heatmap of strikes against sites connected to the alleged chemical weapons attack in Duma

On April 14, the White Helmets reported that pro-government forces had opened fire on a bus carrying forcibly displaced people from Duma en route to Idleb. The bus was beset by gunfire near Salamiyeh in Hama, killing a child. Another four individuals were wounded. The attack appears to have been in retaliation to the US strikes just the day before.

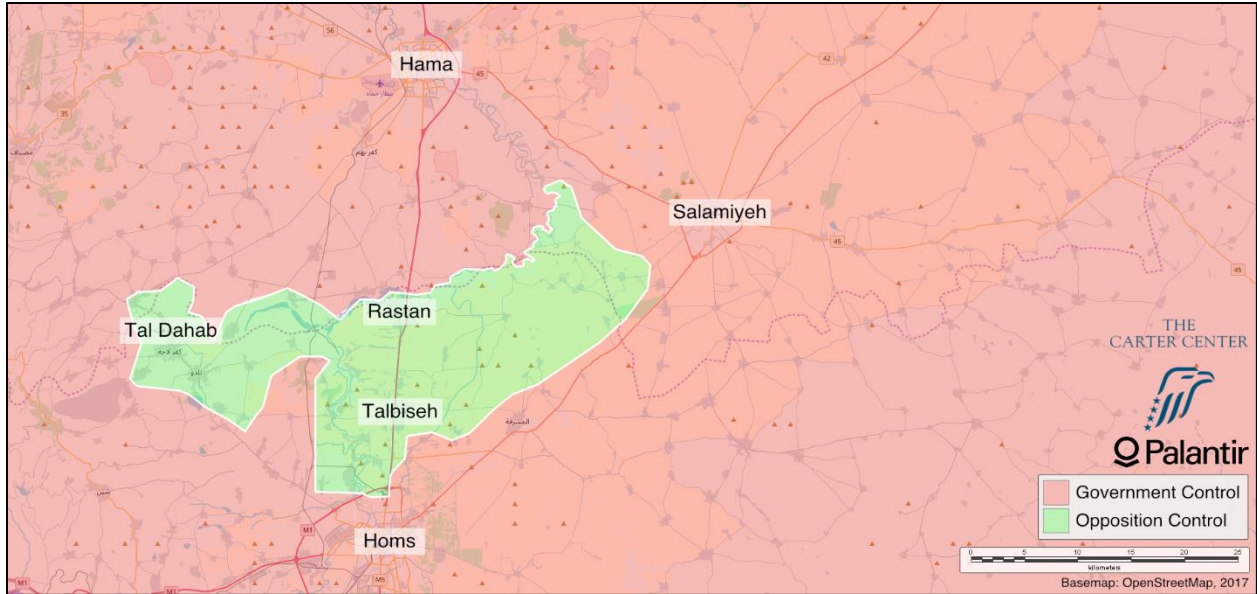


Figure 3 - Situation around Hama and Homs by April 18

Inspectors from the Fact-Finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) announced their intention to visit the site of the alleged chemical attack on April 14. However, when inspectors attempted to enter the area, they were denied access by Russian authorities who cited security concerns and the team’s lack of an appropriate UN license – a claim the UN has refuted.

OPCW experts entered Duma on April 17, but were delayed once more from inspecting the site when they came under fire by pro-government militias. The international community (specifically France, the U.K., and the U.S.) have expressed concerns that delaying the investigation will allow Russian and Syrian forces to destroy evidence of chemical weapons uses in Duma.

Pro-government forces have begun amassing for an offensive on the opposition- and ISIS-held districts south of Damascus around the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp. This pocket of ISIS and opposition control is within mortar and artillery range of central Damascus city, and has been the source of repeated strikes in recent weeks. Given the fact that the area has been under complete or partial siege for years, government forces – bolstered from their recent victory in East Ghouta – are expected to take control of the pocket with relative ease.

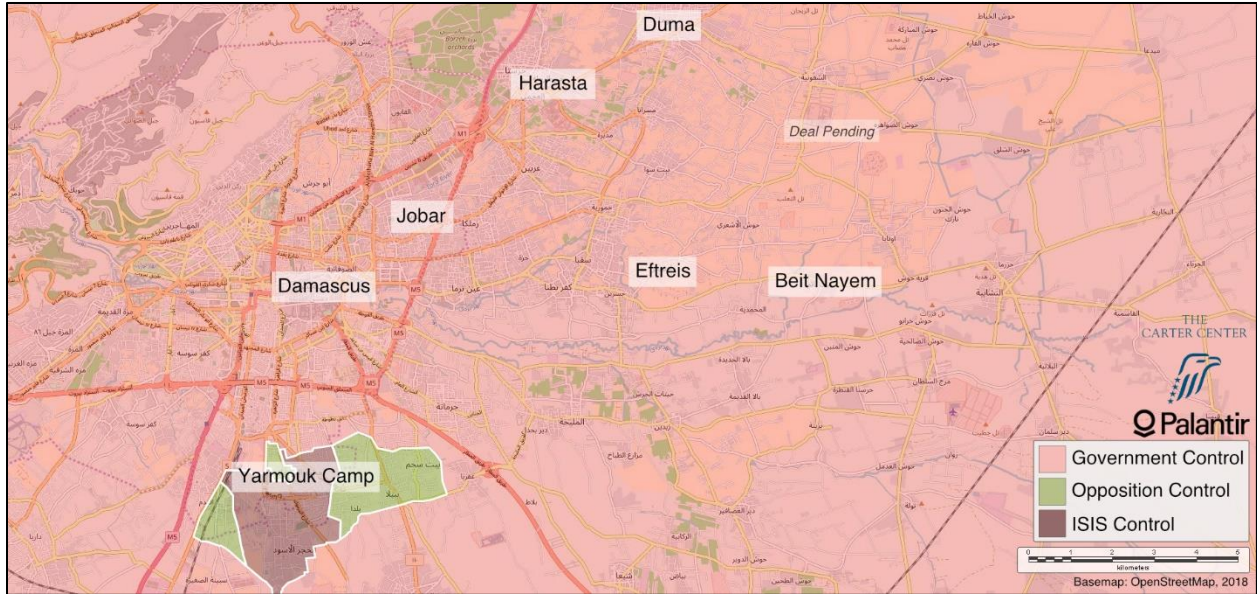


Figure 4 - Situation around Damascus by April 18

Eastern Qalamoun

As operations in Eastern Ghouta have wound down, government forces have been increasingly vocal about their intention to capture opposition-held territory to the northeast of Damascus in the region known as Eastern Qalamoun. Negotiations between opposition, Russian, and government representatives regarding the status of this area have been ongoing for weeks, but recently collapsed. Syrian government forces have already re-deployed to the area from Eastern Ghouta.