

Northern Hama offensives

By March 31, opposition forces retreated from most of the territory gained in the preceding week. Opposition forces in northern Hama lost territory on their western front around Maharda as well as their southern front around Majdal, Maarzaf, and Khattab (see map below). On the eastern front of their offensive, the town of Souran also returned to pro-government hands. The towns of Maardis and nearby Iskanderia changed hands a few times over the week, with HTS forces killing several advancing Tiger Forces fighters as the pro-government group aimed to retake the towns. HTS briefly withdrew from this front line, but returned late in this reporting period after remaining opposition forces in the area began sustaining heavy losses as the Tiger Forces deployed to the area. The Free Idlib Army, Jaysh al-Izza, Faylaq al-Sham, Jaysh al-Nasr, and Ahrar al-Sham have all been involved in the frontlines of the offensive. Pro-government offensives in this area stalled after March 31, and opposition forces began to advance yet again. This was the state of affairs immediately preceding the chemical weapons attack.

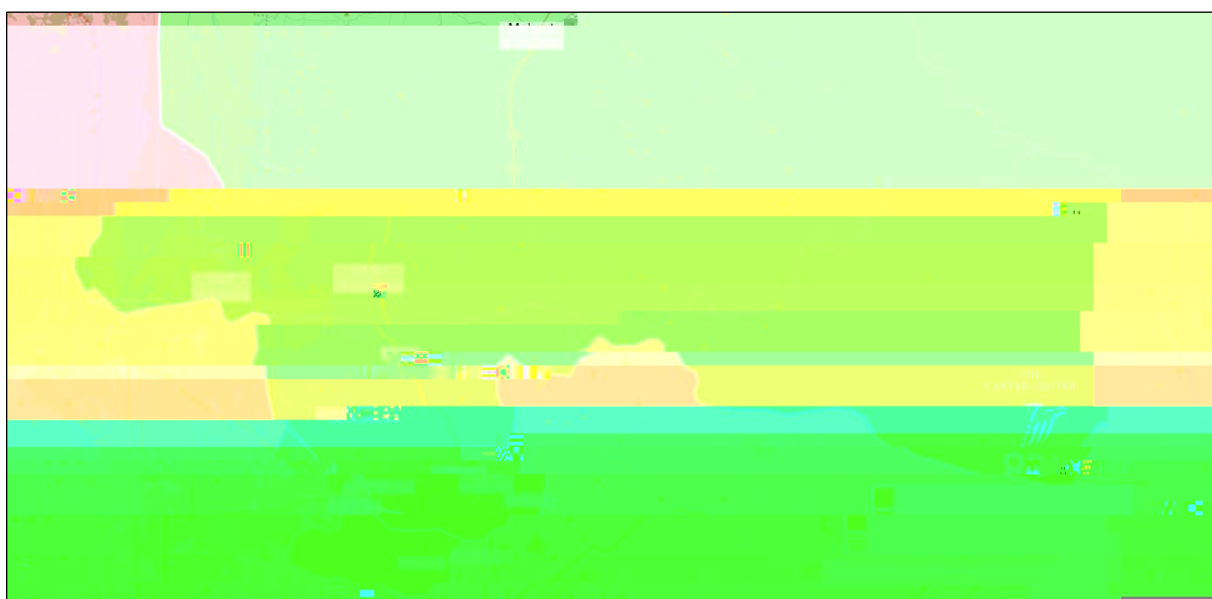


Figure 2 - Map of areas of control north of Hama

Khan Sheikhoun chemical attack

The southern Idlib city of Khan Sheikhoun was hit with a chemical attack on the morning of Tuesday, April 4. Initial evidence suggested the attack may have involved Sarin or a similar nerve agent. According to numerous reports, the death toll has ranged from 70 to 100 people, with hundreds others injured.

Shortly after the attack occurred in Khan Sheikhoun (10-15km from nearest frontlines), White Helmets arrived on the scene to administer medical aid and to take victims to nearby hospitals, mostly to the town of Maarat al- located about 20km to the north of Khan Sheikhoun. At least one hospital treating the wounded from the attack was allegedly hit by an airstrike.

Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) crews arrived in Idlib within a few hours of the attack. By April 6, AFAD crews and collaborating organizations announced based on autopsies that a nerve agent was likely deployed in Khan Sheikhoun. Ahrar al-Sham negotiated entry and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) team. Ahrar al-Sham,

