

Recent IDP movements

Within ISIS-held territory, civilians are congregating in and around the villages of Khabatah, Makkuk and Saydawah. This is to escape artillery fire and fighting in other villages such as Mahana, Khalidiyah, Salahiyah, and Sultan Abdullah. There is an estimated 20,000 people now living in this area. In these three villages there are 3-4 families living in each house. Previously food was collected at a market in Hajj' Ali, but this market is now closed. People now cross the river on boats to Qaiyara to buy their food.

On 19 & 20 April

On 19 April, 58 individuals came from Mahana to Kharbadan where they were picked up by the Iraqi Army, given food and water, and taken on trucks to the Peshmerga screening centre in Makhmour. This was followed by 90 individuals from Makkuk, Hajj' Ali and Mahana in the early morning of 20 April. Mahana is now reportedly empty of civilians.

The Iraqi Army are contacting civilians by mobile phone, or sharing numbers to allow people to contact them. They are then telling civilians to come and that they will be received by the Iraqi Army. They coordinate with coalition forces to create a safe corridor through which the civilians can pass to reach to the IA line. There is still a large danger from IEDs. When civilians are met by the IA they are separated by gender and the men are checked for weapons. All are given food and water and then they are taken in trucks to Makhmour where they are handed over to the Asayish for security screening.

On 20 April there were 30 individuals in the original screening centre outside the PDK office in Makhmour. They had walked from Saydawah to Telarim where they had been picked up by the IA. They reported that ISIS were forcing some people who had relatives on the western side of the Tigris to go to their relatives. They also reported that some families had come from the west side to the east to position themselves to escape. These 30 individuals bring the total that escaped on 20 April to 120. The 90 mentioned earlier were not in the PDK screening centre by late afternoon. It is likely that they had been taken to the three large tents adjacent to Debaga camp for security screening.

On 21 April

On 21 April morning approximately 650 individuals arrived at Kharbadan from Hajj' Ali, Mahana and Khatab. They had been in mobile phone contact with the Iraqi Army and coalition forces were ready to cover their escape from the air. Three ISIS suicide bombers attempted to attack the civilians near Kharbadan but they were killed by the Iraqi Army.

The Peshmerga intervened in Kharbadan to take the civilians to Makhmour. This caused some confusion and annoyance from the Iraqi Army whose role it is to receive civilians and transfer them to the Peshmerga in Makhmour. However, because of the security risk posed by the three suicide bombers, it is possible that a special agreement was made to accelerate the transfer of the civilians to Makhmour.

Different numbers of arrivals were being given throughout the day. By mid afternoon the 650 had been transferred to the extension outside Debaga camp and were in the process of being security screened in the three large tents. At that stage a further 1,000 people were en route to Debaga and

expected later that day. This brings the total civilians to have come through the lines on 21 April to approximately 1,650.

Debaga Camp

As of the afternoon of 21 April, Debaga camp was home to 6,225 IDPs, overreaching its maximum capacity of 4,500 by close to 40%.

An adjacent extension to the camp with an additional capacity of approximately 1,500 individuals was in the process of being built. Three large tents (24m x 10m) had been erected but nothing else. These three tents were being used by the Asayish for security screening because the original screening centre in Makhmour was too small to accommodate the large influx of IDPs on 21 April. The extension was estimated to be ready to accommodate IDPs at its full capacity within a week, but the area's conversion into a screening centre could delay this or change its role.

The football stadium in Debaga town is in the process of being converted into a camp by UNHCR. It will house approximately 300 families. Services are being made ready and IDPs will hopefully be able to start moving in in a few days.

There are plans to build a large new camp near to the current Debaga camp. Permission has been granted by the government and a large area (115 donum) has been selected but no work has started yet.

Miscellaneous information

In Debaga camp we talked to a group of Sobawi men from Kharbatah who said they (numbering approximately 150 in total) had escaped a few days before, leaving their wives and children, specifically to join their sheikh in the fight against ISIS. They arrived at the Queba front line which was controlled by the Peshmerga. They were stripped naked for weapons checks, given food and water, then taken to Makhmour for security screening. A day later they were transferred to Debaga.

There is an 8pm curfew in all the villages controlled by ISIS.

A senior officer in the IA confirmed that civilians had been killed by Iraqi artillery fire in Mahana, but he said that they were now using drones to make sure targeted areas are clear of civilians.

Analysis

It seems that the greater communication between the Iraqi Army and fleeing civilians has precipitated this wave of IDP movement. Unless ISIS reacts strongly in some way it is unlikely that the numbers coming through will decrease for some time. Facilities within Debaga are already overstretched and plans for a large new camp should be put into action as soon as possible.

There should also be some consideration of how to support the Iraqi Army and Sunni militias receiving large numbers at the frontline. Some of these civilians have travelled for days without food and water. There is also a significant danger from ISIS and IEDs. The Iraqi Army has very recently

acquired 8 mobile medical units operating between the base and frontline areas that are able to serve civilians as well as troops.

Some civilians are moving out of ISIS territory while others are being forced further into ISIS territory. It is clear that there are still large population centres – most notably Hajj Ali and Makkuk that still have significant populations (Hajj Ali alone has an estimated 3000 families). Capacity for shelter and lifesaving support in Makhmour should be dramatically increased ASAP as it is just the stalled IA military campaign that is temporarily delaying the need for a dramatic upscaling of humanitarian action.