

Returns from Hamam Al Alil, 6 November

The fighting in Hamam Al Alil town was ongoing on 6 November, with continual helicopter strikes seen targeting remaining ISIS positions. ISIS snipers remained a threat in the town during the day, but ISF are expected to gain full control before long, and may have already done so.

Hamam Al Alil's civilian population swelled exponentially in recent weeks. Over the last fortnight, thousands of people from villages north of Hawd were forcibly relocated to the town so that ISIS could use them as human shields during the coming battle with ISF. We were told that as many as 5-10 families were living in each household and that some families were made to stay in schools and unfinished buildings. Many of these families were transported on to Mosul and Tel Afar for the same purpose.

Reportedly around 400-500 civilians were executed by ISIS in Hamam Al Alil in the last few days alone. Most of them were accused of having a direct or indirect connection with the ISF or had attempted to escape the town. We heard that their bodies have been dumped in two locations on the outskirts of town, although this and the number of executions is yet to be confirmed.

Returns and screening

On 5 November, ISF began to secure parts of the town. Civilians remained in their houses during the fighting, watching and listening to the battle going on outside. When they saw ISF personnel on the streets, they left their houses and went to them. Residents of Hamam Al Alil (i.e. the host community) were told to go back to their houses and wait there – only IDPs were taken out of the town. They were given preliminary screening (weapons check – men only) and guided on foot out of Hamam Al Alil to the nearby village of As Salahiyah, about a kilometre south.





Crowds, predominantly women and children, walking through As Salahiyah having left Hamam Al Alil.

On 6 November we witnessed large crowds walking peacefully through As Salahiyah to a transport site about a kilometre south of the village, where ISF trucks were gathered to take people to their villages. Most of them seemed happy and excited. Women and children made up the vast majority of the crowds, with only relatively few men present. We were told that some of the men were still hiding in Hamam Al Alil because they feared being caught escaping by ISIS, who were still active in some areas of the town. We also heard that ISF were holding some of them in a separate location for more careful screening.

We met a large group of civilians – possibly a few hundred – at a school on the southern outskirts of As Salahiyah. The vast majority were men and boys. It seemed that most of these people were from As Salahiyah village. There may have been other temporary locations like this (the school was empty when we returned a few hours later). They said they were waiting to be security screened before they could return to their houses. We were told that families with a son or relative in the Hashd Ashaari were able to go to their villages immediately (we witnessed a number of emotional reunions) but those without a connection would have to wait.

Services and priority needs in returnee villages

There are around 25 villages close to the river on the west bank of the Tigris between Hawd Fawqani and Hamam al Alil. Many of these villages will have already received or will soon be receiving returnees from Hamam Al Alil. It should also be noted that a large number of the people who were taken to Hamam Al Alil were transported on to Mosul and Tel Afar and will not be among the current returnees.



There are numerous destroyed buildings along the main street of As Salahiyah.

According to local sources, IED contamination is less of an issue in these villages than in other areas, although there are some IEDs on the main road and extreme caution should still be exercised and local advice sought when going anywhere in or between these villages.

Priority needs in the villages are likely to be similar across the board:

1. Water – the rehabilitation of local water projects varies considerably in levels of complexity.
2. Food – most markets are not functioning, there is restriction of movement, and poorer families cannot afford to buy food. Incidentally, in the Al Qayyarah sub-district we've seen that once a degree of freedom of movement is granted, markets rehabilitate relatively quickly.

The following is a very brief summary of the needs in three returnee villages:

As Salahiyah (36.15441 43.25546) has an original population of around 6,700 individuals.

- Water is the main priority – the pipes of the water project are broken and electricity is needed to work the pumps.
- Emergency food supplies are also required.

Munayrah (36.08931 43.28163) has an original population of around 400-600 families.

- Apparently almost half have already returned from Hamam Al Alil.
- The main priority in the village is water – there is a fully functioning water project in the village, but there is no fuel to power the generator. For now residents use the water from the tanks of their neighbours who have not yet returned.
- Food is the second priority. A small number of villagers have been security screened because they previously escaped to Al Qayyarah and were screened there. They now collect food from Al Qayyarah for their neighbours who have not been screened and are therefore unable to travel. Those without money to purchase food rely on others.

- There is a PHCC and staff (expected to return from Hamam Al Alil) but there are no medicines.
- The main road in Munayrah is clear of IEDs but there is a danger of booby traps in the houses.

Tulul Nasr (35.94271 43.31600) has an original population of around 6,000 individuals.

- Around 20% of the population has returned so far.
- As in Munayrah, the population has not been screened but they rely on the help of individuals (like relatives in the Iraqi Army) to collect food from Al Qayyarah.
- The village water project is operational only once every two days because of a lack of fuel to power the generators. The supply will be insufficient once more returnees arrive.
- The entire village has reportedly been cleared of IEDs and booby traps.
- There is a pharmacy in the village but without medicines. Al Qayyarah is the nearest hospital.

Hashd al Shaabi (Shia)

The Shia Hashd al Shaabi (PMF) are operating in the Hamam Al Alil sub-district and further west, pushing up towards Mosul and Tel Afar. They are made up of many different militias (it is unknown exactly which are operating in the Hamam Al Alil area or just passing through, but the Kataib Hezbollah has been spotted) and their reputations differ. However, it is worth noting that they are active in the area.

Rise has further details on the screening process and the Shia militias and can be consulted bilaterally.