

## Bowkat screening site, Qaraj, 18 January

The Peshmerga screening site at Bowkat village (aka Yaramjah) (N35°38.991′ E043°32.371′) lies in the Qaraj sub-dsitrict, 16 km south of Makhmour town. There is heavy destruction in some parts of the village. It is home to both Kurds and Arabs (mixed tribes) although the village is currently empty because of its proximity to the frontline. The frontline borders the southern end of the village and runs roughly north-west to south-east along a well-established trench intersected with fortified outposts.

## Arrival of IDPs at the Peshmerga frontline in Qaraj

Along this 25-km stretch of frontline from Pwngina village (N35°35.420′ E043°40.554′) to the border between Peshmerga and Iraqi Army control near Hushtr Aluk, between 50 and 300 IDPs arrive each night on foot from Hawiga and villages nearby. Sometimes the total reaches around 700 in one night. The journey itself is very dangerous. Each week, 2-3 incidents of IED explosions are reported, sometimes killing or severely injuring several members of the same family. There have been cases of children arriving by themselves, having lost their parents to an IED explosion on the journey. ISIS members also patrol on motorbikes between the villages on this route. They have been known to kill civilians trying to escape. As in other areas, some ISIS members accept money (around \$300) to guide families through the minefield and to the frontline. However, this is sometimes a trick and families lose their money and are then prevented from leaving and/or are punished for wanting to escape.





Upon their arrival at the Peshmerga frontline, people are tired, hungry, thirsty and cold. They have often been walking for up to 7 hours or more from Hawiga town or the villages in the area. Some have also had to swim across the Lesser Zab river. Depending on what has happened to them on their journey, they can be severely traumatised. People usually arrive in small groups or in groups of up to 200. When they approach the frontline they are told to show themselves clearly under the lamps and to remove any bulky clothing to prove they are not hiding any weapons or explosives. They are then searched by the Peshmerga and allowed across the line. The Peshmerga give the IDPs food and water when they have supplies to spare. An ambulance is kept at the screening site at Bowkat and is sent for to carry injured civilians to hospital in Makhmour, in the company of a member of the Asayish if they have not yet been screened. ISIS members sometimes attach themselves to a family, but according to the Peshmerga, the IDPs themselves will usually identify any ISIS members among them.

If the IDPs arrive at a position on the frontline close to Bowkat village, they are transported by the Peshmerga to the screening site after usually no longer than half an hour. However, IDPs arriving at positions further from Bowkat such as Pwngina are kept on the outer side of the frontline until dawn, when they are transported together in Peshmerga trucks to the screening site at Bowkat. At Pwngina, where most IDPs arrive as it is closer to Hawiga, the IDPs are not allowed past the line during the night for security reasons, although the Peshmerga give food and blankets if they can spare any. The IDPs build fires for warmth, but cold was reported to be the main concern. The ambulance in Bowkat is called immediately for emergency medical cases for transport to Makhmour hospital.

The current frontline was established at the end of 2014 and has not moved since then. The last attack by ISIS took place around 4 months ago and involved under 20 fighters. The Peshmerga sometimes lead sorties out into ISIS territory, but other than that the frontline is quiet.



Looking out over the frontline at Pwngina at the area where IDPs gather during the night before they are transported to Bowkat screening site at dawn.



## Bowkat screening site

The screening site at Bowkat is under Peshmerga control. They usually receive 50-200 people per day, although the total is sometimes far higher. On average, the site receives around 3,000 IDPs per month. The IDPs usually start arriving from the frontline from 10-11 pm. They arrive on Peshmerga transport and continue arriving until the morning. Please contact Rise for more information on screening at Bowkat.

During the process, the IDPs are kept in a large stone building opposite the Peshmerga office. The building has a capacity of around 100-150 people — anyone unable to fit inside stays outside in a large walled area connected to the building. Men are separated from women and children during the screening. There is a separate portacabin just outside the Peshmerga office building which is kept for pregnant women or anyone in especially poor health. The Peshmerga have provided a heater inside the portacabin.



Portacabin provided for pregnant women or anyone in especially poor health.

According to the Peshmerga, drinking water is the priority need at the screening site. There are boreholes in the village but the water is brackish. The Peshmerga bring untreated river water to the screening site twice a day. The water they provide is not clean but it is often all the IDPs have to drink – the bottled water provided in MOMD food boxes is insufficient. The Peshmerga want NGOs to provide water tanks at the site and to take over the responsibility of water trucking. It was also reported that many of the IDPs are excessively dirty and that severe skin diseases are very common as they have often not had soap to wash with for several months.

Latrines are another major need as there are no facilities at all for IDPs at the site. The Peshmerga are sometimes able to provide blankets, but the vast majority of IDPs will spend the night without any covers. There is also a severe shortage of heaters and fuel for heaters. Food is another major need. The IDPs have often travelled a long way and have not eaten for many hours. MOMD provide around 200-300 ready-to-eat food boxes to the screening site every ten days or so, but the Peshmerga report that this is not sufficient and they have to give food from their own supply and often the IDPs go hungry.





Stone building and outside area where IDPs are kept overnight during the screening process.

IDPs usually spend around a day at the site and leave at about 3pm on coaches paid for by the Baghdad government and ordered from Erbil. It was reported that men are no longer separated from women and children at this stage. They are taken to a collection point in Makhmour, controlled by the Asayish. From there they are transported to the Jadaa camps, where they are expected to undergo further screening by the National Security Service. They do not have a choice on where they will go and it is only those with strong personal connections that may be able to receive sponsorship to go to Erbil or Kirkuk.