

Medical facility / reception centre south of Athbah & update on Hamam al Alil camp, 29 January

The small flow of IDPs crossing the frontline at Athbah (aka Adbah) is growing and is likely to increase further with the build-up to the operation to retake West Mosul. The week before last, an average of around 5 IDPs were arriving at the Athbah frontline from Mosul each night – now the average is at around 30. Once the ground operation in West Mosul begins, it is likely that the majority of IDPs will flee to the south along Highway 1 and the river, bringing the average up to a far greater total.



IDPs arriving at the Athbah frontline

The frontline on Highway 1 stands just south of Athbah on a high ridge overlooking the village. It is currently manned by the Federal Police with, as far as we saw, some ISF units from the 9th brigade. The village is deserted although ISIS fighters sometimes enter it and attack the frontline with mortars and sniper fire.



Athbah village from the frontline. Highway 1 can be seen to the left. The road continues for around 8km before reaching the outskirts of West Mosul.



A position on the frontline where IDPs usually arrive having walked from Mosul. Athbah village is to the left, out of the picture.

IDPs escaping south from West Mosul travel on foot and at night to avoid detection by ISIS. Landmines present a major risk on this route, as does being caught or shot at by ISIS members. The cold weather can also be lethal to those who are already in poor health. When they arrive at the frontline, the IDPs are not allowed to pass until the morning due to security reasons; they therefore have to pass a cold night on the hillside, although the Federal Police give their own blankets to the IDPs when they can.

If there are casualties among the IDPs an ambulance is immediately called for from the nearby FedPol medical facility during the night. After stabilization, serious casualties are taken from this medical facility to hospital at Qayarah. We were told that in the past 10 days there have been over 5 serious casualties.

In the morning the IDPs are searched for weapons and explosives and allowed through the frontline. Members of ISF military intelligence arrive with minibuses to collect the IDPs. They also take their IDs at this point.

Medical facility / reception centre south of Athbah

The IDPs are transported by ISF military intelligence to the aforementioned Federal Police medical facility (36°11'51" N 43°04'45" E), which is located on Highway 1 around 3km south of the frontline. We were told that, in this area at least, the Federal Police are insisting that every IDP coming through the frontlines must receive a medical checkup before being passed on for screening.

A very high percentage of IDPs coming from West Mosul are reportedly infected with Leishmaniasis, also known as 'Baghdad boil' or 'habat Baghdad'. The disease is spread by sandflies and causes ulcers on the skin. Those suffering from malnutrition and lack of sanitation are reportedly at greater risk of infection. We were told that the prevalence of this disease is the main reason why the Federal Police have insisted on medical check ups for newly arrived IDPs. At the medical facility, IDPs reportedly receive medicine to treat this disease. Scabies may also account for some cases of skin disease but very high rates of Leishmaniasis were confirmed to us.



This asphalt plant is located next to the medical facility, on the east side of Highway 1.

This medical facility consists of around 5 rooms and an open courtyard area. It currently serves as a PHC, a trauma stabilization unit/casualty collection point, and reception centre for IDPs. It is currently staffed by 1 doctor and 8 medics. A group of volunteer medics belonging to the Multinational Emergency Response Medical Team (MERMT) is planning to join the staff shortly. They will boost the facility's capacity, particularly in first-line trauma stabilization, cases of which are expected to increase exponentially once the operation begins. The medical facility is primarily set up to serve civilians, but military casualties brought there will also receive treatment. The medical facility itself may change location to remain close to the frontlines as the operation advances north.

IDPs usually stay at this medical facility for around 1 hour but this period is likely to increase when more IDPs start to arrive, as is expected. At the facility, medicines are a major need, particularly with the prevalence of Leishmaniasis. Most of the IDPs are suffering from a very cold night spent on the hillside – there are no blankets or heaters at the facility and these are urgently needed. The FedPol captain in charge of the facility has requested 250 blankets and 15 heaters as a start to ensure that the IDPs will be kept warm, even if their numbers do dramatically increase. Ready-to-eat food is another requirement as it is usually many hours since the IDPs have eaten anything. Drinking water is supplied by the Federal Police but this may also become a need as numbers increase.

Screening

After their medical checkup, the IDPs are taken in minibuses by the ISF military intelligence to a PMF base further south on Highway 1 for security screening. The exact location of this base was not disclosed to us and we were unable to gather much information about it. The National Security Service (NSS) carry out the screening using laptops containing a database of ISIS suspects. We were told that once IDPs have passed the screening process their IDs are returned to them and they are taken to camps in Jadaa. We were not told about what happens to IDPs whose names are on the database.

Medical checkup for newly arrived IDPs

We were told by the Federal Police that as the number of IDPs coming through this route increases, they will still all receive a medical checkup before continuing to the screening site. Whether this will be practical in the event of hundreds of IDPs arriving at once remains to be seen. In other areas, IDPs (excepting emergency medical cases) are usually taken immediately to the screening site, which also acts as a reception centre for onward travel to camps or relatives. Primary healthcare is usually left until after the screening.

Access to the medical facility south of Athbah

The road leading south-west of Hamam al Alil and curving round to meet Highway 1 avoids PMF checkpoints although access from Hamam al Alil may still be problematic until there is a standardised process agreed with the Federal Police. Highway 1 was dug up by ISIS every 20m or so, so travel is generally slow along this road.

Update on the camp in Hamam al Alil

The MOMD camp is located at N36°09.756' E043°14.873'.

- 4,000 tents in total with room for expansion if necessary.
- 1,000 of the tents are ready to receive IDPs with WASH facilities complete.
- 2,000 of the tents are approaching completion – if the weather holds they should be completed by the end of the week, including WASH facilities.
- The structures of the remaining 1,000 tents have been erected but the canvas is awaited from Baghdad. These are in the initial stage of construction.
- There is no electricity at the site but generators are to be supplied by Baghdad when IDPs start arriving.

- The site is connected to the local water project serving only this small area within Hamam al Alii.

