

Baghdad Circle and Wadi al Ayn, 2 April

The road leading from the 4th bridge on the northern side of Al Jawasaq, Al Tayaran, and Al Ghazlani is now accessible and can be used to travel across to Baghdad Circle via Wadi Hajar or Al Mansour. However, there is still a risk of snipers in neighbourhoods to the north of this road and the road itself is more exposed to BBIED and mortar attack than areas to the south. There is one FedPol checkpoint on the road, south of the train station. Heavy destruction of houses can be seen on either side.

Although re-taken neighbourhoods have been cleared of IEDs and the remaining populations have been screened, security forces warn of the ongoing threat posed by ISIS sleeper cells in recently retaken areas. For now it is still advisable to access eastern neighbourhoods via Albu Saif and western neighbourhoods via Scorpion Junction as before, rather than travelling between these two areas within the city.

Baghdad Circle

Numbers of IDPs collecting at Baghdad Circle for onward transport to Hamam al Alil have reduced in recent days, averaging at around 500 individuals per day. This is due to a pause in territorial shifts within frontline neighbourhoods. Numbers of returns along this route to neighbourhoods such as Wadi Hajar, Al Ma'mun and Al Samud are continuing at around 200-300 individuals per day, although this number may also include those returning from volunteer screening at Scorpion Junction. A continued lack of services is reportedly the main factor discouraging further returns to southern neighbourhoods where there is a reduced risk from indirect fire.

The area around the Baghdad Circle, particularly on Highway 1 to the north-west, is crowded not only with IDPs bound for Hamam al Alil, but more so with people who have come from other neighbourhoods to buy or collect food. Some shops have been established in this area offering goods at a cheaper price than shops in other neighbourhoods (which are also still rare) – therefore people walk to this area to buy groceries and cigarettes. People can also be seen waiting on the road for the arrival of food distributions. The daily number of distributions to this area has reportedly reduced. There was a small PMF distribution out of two Kia trucks ongoing during our visit.

There was a WHO mobile clinic stationed near the Baghdad Circle with a small crowd gathered around it. There continues to be a major need for mobile clinics in eastern neighbourhoods such as Al Tayaran.



Wadi al Ayn

Around 60% of the population of Wadi al Ayn (located between Al Mansour and Mosul al Jadida) remained when ISOF took the neighbourhood around 20 days ago. This was largely because ISIS fighters fell back from the neighbourhood overnight, offering little resistance. There are reportedly only a small number of IDP families from other neighbourhoods living in Wadi al Ayn, and due to the speed of the ISOF advance in this area, ISIS had no opportunity to force the population to displace further north into their remaining territory for use as human shields. Therefore the 40% estimated to have left the neighbourhood are reported to have gone south to Hamam al Alil. We were told that the chief reason for this displacement is lack of food and drinking water. No returns were reported.

For the moment, most of the drinking water and food in Wadi al Ayn is reportedly supplied by ISOF. There are water tanks on top of most of the houses and water trucking has been requested by residents. The water project that services this area is reportedly to the north-west, on the Badoush road and still in ISIS territory. There are private boreholes in the neighbourhood but the water is not suitable for drinking, even after boiling.

The Public Distribution System has not been established in this area and there is a general feeling of dissatisfaction with government attempts to provide basic necessities. There are some shops, but these are expensive and most residents with money to buy food choose to walk to Al Ma'mun.

Screening was conducted in Wadi al Ayn 2 days after ISOF took the neighbourhood. The remaining population was gathered in a school and had their IDs checked there. They were not given any paper to prove that they had passed through screening once the process had been completed.

People generally seem to feel more secure with ISOF in the area, particularly as there is currently a heightened awareness of the possibility of BBIEDs breaking through the frontlines to the north. Wadi al Ayn receives sporadic indirect fire, but this doesn't seem to be a critical concern for the population.