

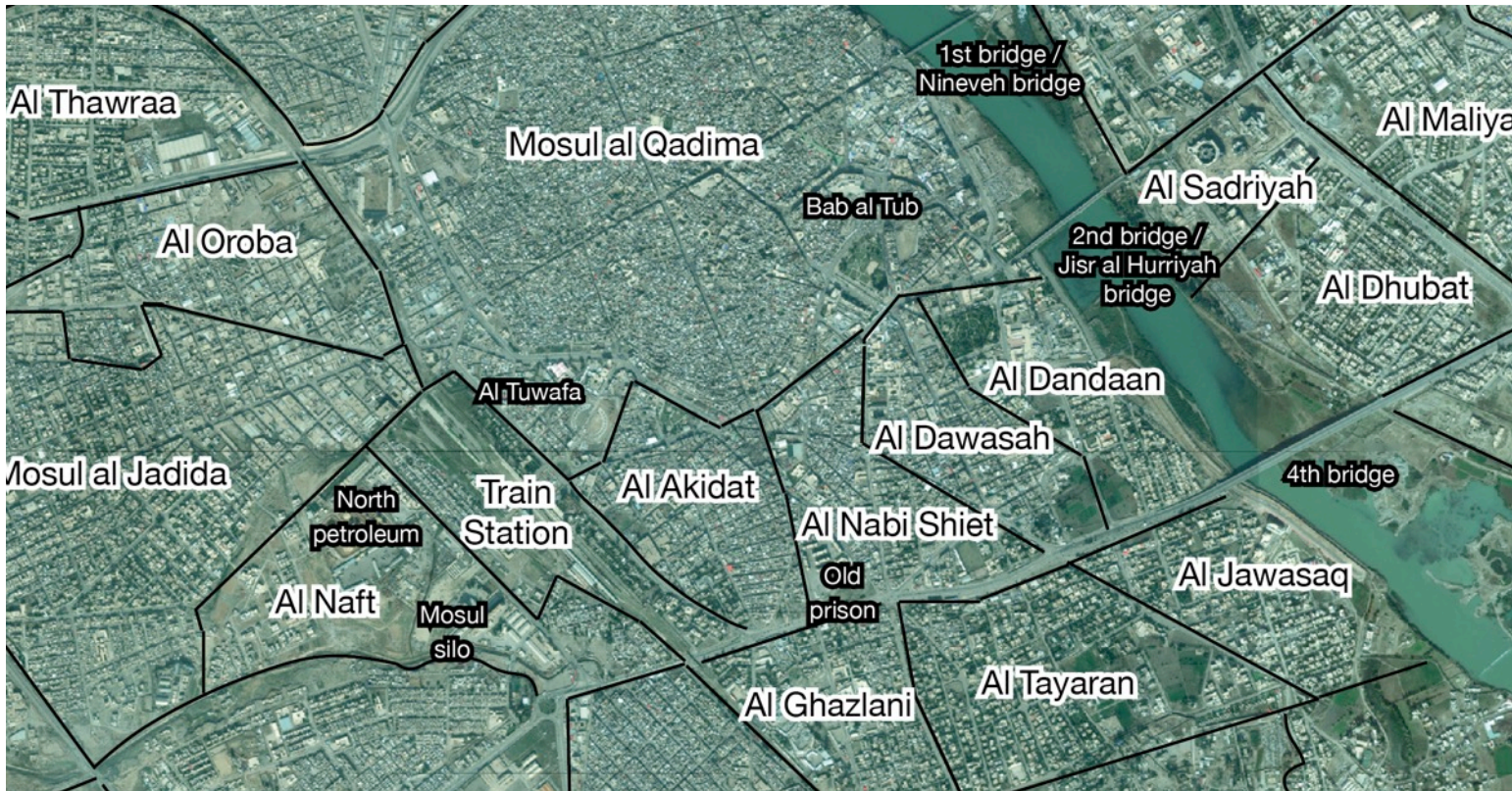
## Al Akidat, 5 April

Al Akidat neighbourhood (also spelt as Al Aghidat) is located south of the Old City, between the train station and Al Nabi Shi'et. The main roads in the neighbourhood have been cleared although some are damaged by airstrikes and many of the side roads are blocked with rubble. Most houses are still habitable, although almost all have some damage such as blown out windows. The frontline is on Al Akidat's northern boundary, approximately along the edge of the Old City. The neighbourhood was retaken 2-3 weeks ago.

### *Human shields in the Old City and evacuation plans*

During or just before the FedPol advance into Al Akidat, ISIS pulled back large numbers of the resident population into the Old City to further swell the population there, providing effective cover from airstrikes, artillery and ground offensives. As in other neighbourhoods, squads were assigned to execute or severely punish any civilians refusing to move or attempting to flee. The human shield tactic is proving particularly effective within the densely packed streets of the Old City, where snipers are reportedly surrounding themselves with female civilians as they move to new positions, making it extremely difficult for Iraqi forces to target them without causing unwanted casualties. Human shields embody ISIS's greatest strategic advantage in West Mosul – one which they guard with signature brutality. Snipers are a major threat to civilian families attempting to escape; the arrival at TSPs of children with fatal head wounds caused by sniper bullets is not uncommon. We have also been told of several mass executions in the Old City of families charged with attempting to escape, including the recent execution of 22 families – around 100 individuals – outside the hamam in the Makawi neighbourhood on 3 April. There has therefore been relatively little displacement from the Old City, despite extremely poor conditions there.

We received mixed responses from FedPol sources regarding their alleged plans to evacuate civilians from the Old City, as reported in the press. Most were not aware of any such plans although some sources in forward positions did not go so far as to discount them. We have since learnt that the decision still lies with higher political authorities and has not yet been made. Either way, when an assault on the Old City is made, we can expect a large influx of IDPs coming through Al Akidat, a main route out of the Old City.







*Street in Al Akidat hit by an airstrike and blocked off by vehicles and rubble.*

#### *Displacement and returns*

In Al Akidat, ISIS were unable to round up the entire population for forced relocation to the Old City. Therefore a significant portion of the population managed to flee towards the airport where they were picked up by FedPol minibuses and transported to Hamam al Alil screening site. Many of this number only left for a week to 10 days, until they received information that their area was secure under FedPol control. Al Akidat is now split very roughly into two halves – the lower half has between 40-50% returnees (with some IDP families from other neighbourhoods staying with host families), while the upper half, bordering the frontline, is practically empty. A small number of families stayed in Al Akidat during the fighting, mostly hiding in their basements, although many with this option decided to flee anyway for fear of being mistaken as ISIS fighters when discovered by Iraqi forces.

We are beginning to see more returnees to retaken areas of West Mosul, particularly Al Ma'mun, Al Mansour, Wadi Hajar and Tell ar Rayyan. People are mainly returning because they feel their neighbourhood is safe enough and they want to protect their homes and don't want to remain in camps or elsewhere. Government coaches are reportedly provided for returnees departing from Hamam al Alil and Arij and going to Baghdad Circle (coaches carrying returns apparently do not travel via Albu Saif, but only to Baghdad Circle). Heads of households will often travel back to their house first to check its condition and security before going back for the rest of the family.

#### *Needs*

Drinking water is the greatest need in Al Akidat. There are some communal boreholes but the water is only good for cleaning. Most houses have water tanks on the roofs – some have been damaged by bullets and shrapnel but most are intact. The neighbourhood is reportedly linked to the Ghazlani Water Project in Al Wadi al Jawaq and the local pipe network is relatively undamaged, but this is unverified. Bottled water is currently supplied by FedPol, but the quantity is severely insufficient. As in other newly retaken neighbourhoods, an accelerated and systematic response of water trucking is consistently requested by residents.

There are no markets in Al Akidat. Food is supplied by the FedPol who request extra food and water from their suppliers to meet the civilian needs. However, there is still a major shortage. Some people make the 2-hour round trip on foot to Al Ma'mun where they can buy food at a reasonable price or collect food handed out at distributions. There has reportedly only been one food and water distribution in this area – by the PMF – which took place on 5 April. There is currently no sign of the Public Distribution System being re-established in this neighbourhood. The thorough and rapid restoration of the PDS in newly retaken neighbourhoods is another key advocacy point which should be backed up by monitoring on the ground.

There is a FedPol TSP in Al Akidat located in a house formerly used by ISIS as a prison. (FedPol are reportedly selective in the houses they occupy in Al Akidat – either staying in houses formerly belonging to ISIS members or where they have permission from owners.) Residents go to receive primary health care but medicines are scarce, particularly for small children. The PHC in Al Ma'mun is reportedly well stocked, but for many families this is too far away. NGOs able to supply stocks of basic medicines for children for conditions such as colds, fevers, coughs and dehydration, are in very high demand in Al Akidat.