

## Al Risalah, 12 April

There has been a prolonged lull in the fighting in West Mosul. Despite the signs of destruction all around and the continued threats from ISIS, the atmosphere in retaken areas is generally relaxed; people are on the streets and markets are regenerating. It can be hard to imagine the horrific contrast such a short distance away in the Old City. Very soon the rush of IDPs out of the city will resume, and very possibly in greater volume and with greater suddenness than before. Humanitarian partners should be positioning themselves in preparation for this inevitability.

### Baghdad Circle

Baghdad Circle was described to us by a member of the CTS stationed there as currently little more than a bus stop where people from the city board coaches for travel to Scorpion Junction or Hamam al Alil – and often on to Qayyarah or East Mosul from there – to collect aid, visit relatives, or go to hospital. Young entrepreneurs wait at the circle with wooden trolleys for people returning on the same coaches needing help to transport their boxes and bags of aid for the walk home.

The willingness to travel out of the city to collect aid does not necessarily mean that there is a vast shortage of supplies within the city (although that's not to say shortages don't exist). Leading up to the operation, many families stockpiled supplies for months. These stocks have gone but the mentality remains; the near future is far from certain and residents in retaken areas naturally want to benefit from aid distributions wherever they're taking place.

Markets are appearing across a number of retaken neighbourhoods, although Al Ma'mun continues to be a hub for shoppers. The regular stationing of a mobile health clinic is another reason why crowds are drawn to Baghdad Circle.



Although there are few civilians fleeing the conflict via this route for the moment, this is bound to change soon with upcoming offensives. The FedPol-controlled airport area is likely to be the main mustering point for IDPs coming from the Old City, but as ISOF are expected to join in the offensive from the west, we can also expect significant displacement from the Old City to round on the CTS-controlled Baghdad Circle. That is not to mention further displacement from neighbourhoods west and north of the Old City.

### Al Risalah

Around 60-70% of the original population remains in Al Risalah neighbourhood, in addition to IDP families from other neighbourhoods. During the fighting most people fled to neighbouring Al Amil, where they stayed for around 9 days until able to return in relative safety. Some residents fled further to Baghdad Circle and boarded transport to Hamam al Alil and beyond, while others were forced by ISIS to draw back into northern neighbourhoods. The frontline currently cuts across the north of Al Mattahin and Al Yarmuk neighbourhoods, and fighting continues close by in Al Abar and Al Nahrwan.

PMF food kitchens have reportedly reached Al Risalah although it was not clear how frequently they give meals out in the area. A local organisation specialising in health, IAHO, also reportedly carried out a food distribution about a week ago, although again, details were unclear. ISOF also gives out food and water. Incidentally, ISOF personnel were eager to assert that they only inhabit houses in Al Risalah that previously belonged to known ISIS members. There is a special FedPol unit attached to ISOF 2 in the area which, we were told, has been carrying out water trucking in some areas. Al Risalah is a wealthy neighbourhood and the houses are mostly large with several tanks on each roof. Water trucking is the most important need although some households reportedly continue to have stocks of water in their tanks. However, we also heard of families being compelled to leave because they did not have access to clean water. As in other neighbourhoods, residents spoke of dissatisfaction with the lack of government support in Al Risalah. The PDS has reportedly not begun in the neighbourhood although there is a surprisingly high number of small markets. In nearby Al Amil, the markets offer clothes, shoes, generators and fuel in addition to water and food, including fresh produce.



*Some streets in Al Risalah have sustained enormous damage.*

There is a PHC/TSP in Al Risalah which has been open for about a week. It is run by IAHO and ISOF. The facility reportedly has 25 staff including 5 doctors. They are currently treating around 250 patients a day – mostly for basic illnesses. There is a shortage of medicines for babies.

Al Risalah is frequently targeted by ISIS mortars and there have been recent civilian casualties in the neighbourhood. Snipers also pose a threat in long exposed streets leading to the north. EOD teams have also not completed clearance operations – one of the reasons why many streets remain blocked with charred vehicles, debris and soil berms. The extent of destruction in some streets is colossal, while others nearby have escaped lightly. House to house screening is reportedly only partially complete and there is a chance that ISIS sleeper cells exist in the neighbourhood, although this possibility is to be expected in newly retaken areas.

To the west of Al Risalah, Nablous and Rajim al Hadid reportedly have less by way of markets and support and worse security. According to ISOF, non-armoured vehicles are currently not meant to access Al Risalah although there are no checkpoints controlling access within the neighbourhood, only many blocked streets. The security situation is improving daily as ISIS is pushed back in Al Nahrwan and Al Abar and ISOF further secures Al Yarmuk and Al Mattahin. By next week it is likely that security will be vastly improved in Al Risalah. The neighbourhood could then be included in a coordinated water trucking response – the primary need in Al Risalah.