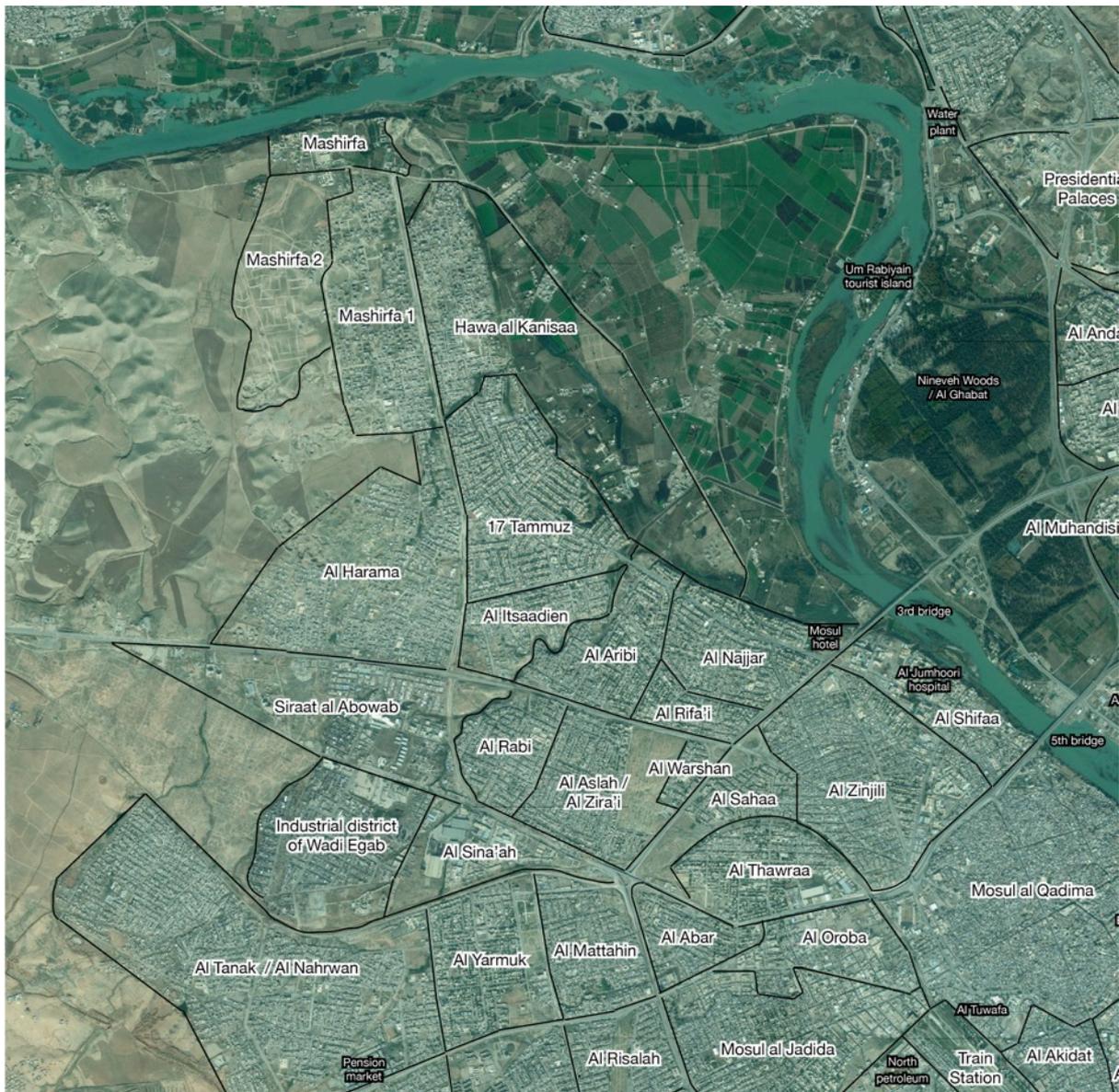


## Update on displacement and returnees in northern neighbourhoods, 24 May

The offensive against remaining ISIS-held neighbourhoods is expected to resume shortly, initiating further heavy displacement. The intensity of the fighting is likely to continue; we heard that in 17 Tammuz, ISIS fighters had sandbagged themselves into strategic positions within houses, making it extremely difficult for Iraqi forces to clear them without taking casualties. When a house was declared cleared, families would often start pouring out of the basement – often numbering around 50 individuals in each house. It is generally suspected by those on the ground that a high proportion of civilians hiding in these neighbourhoods are the families of ISIS fighters. Non-combatant male suspects are sometimes picked up immediately – before they reach a screening site.



*We were advised against using the road that passes between Al Harama and 17 Tammuz due to an ongoing risk of IEDs. The berm blocking the Syria Highway at the western edge of Mosul has now been removed and therefore the Syria Highway can be reached passing through Al Aslah. However, for now the route via Barracuda road (leading to Sahaji) and the gravel road to the north (see Rise report 15 May) is the safer option for access to the Syria Highway.*

### Displacement routes

Displacement west towards the muster point at the fuel station on the Syria Highway has reduced significantly in recent days due mainly to the full recovery of 17 Tammuz by Iraqi forces. This neighbourhood is now reportedly empty of civilians.

When the offensive restarts, civilians fleeing Al Shifaa and the north of Al Zinjili may still head west along the Syria Highway via the muster point in Al Harama (see Rise report 15 May); however, the corresponding 9<sup>th</sup> Div. CCP is expected to move closer to the frontline. If this means the closure of the muster point at this location, a greater portion of future IDPs may be guided to the muster point at the Al Samat mosque in northern Al Mattahin, effectively closing the Syria Highway as a route for displacement. A new muster point may also be set up between Al Mattahin and the Old City for IDPs fleeing south via the shortest route. Civilians are also expected to displace north, crossing the new bridge into East Mosul (see below). Cimcoord have latest details regarding the muster points.

### Returnees to northern neighbourhoods

While very few families are currently displacing via Hulaylah (although small numbers are still picked up by ISF trucks within the city and taken to the fuel station muster point via the Hulaylah screening site) returnees are beginning to appear in the northern neighbourhoods of Mashirfa and Hawa al Kanisaa. Most travel through the city from Hamam al Alil and East Mosul via Scorpion Junction, Baghdad Circle and Yarmuk. At this stage, it is often the men who come to inspect their property and then go back to fetch their families. However, some whole families have already returned from Hamam al Alil camp, East Mosul and nearby villages; of this latter group, it is unclear whether all have passed through the screening process. With families returning from multiple locations and the ongoing risk of ISIS sleeper cells, it is very likely that, as in the East, security forces will conduct further house-to-house screenings for returnees when a significant number have returned.



*Large numbers of ISIS-made RPGs have been left on the streets in Mashirfa.*



Free Burma Rangers are based in Mashirfa and returnee families come to them for food and water. Water is the greatest need. FBR had recorded the arrival of 190 returnee families on 24 May, many of which had collected supplies from them – a large increase on the previous day. There is also reportedly a 9<sup>th</sup> Div. CCP in Hawa al Kanisaa which hands out food and water. There are no markets in these neighbourhoods and because of the long distance from Baghdad Circle and southern neighbourhoods where most trade passes through, it may take longer than average for markets to re-establish in this area. The large water project in northern Mashirfa (36.3902778, 043.0666667) is easily accessible although we were unable to confirm whether it has been fully cleared of IEDs.

There is a new pontoon bridge over the Tigris at the north-eastern corner of West Mosul although it is currently strictly reserved for military use; however, IDPs are reportedly (or will be) allowed to use the bridge to cross over to East Mosul on foot. It has not yet been confirmed whether returns will be permitted to cross on this route. If this bridge is opened for full civilian use in both directions in the near future, it will act as a catalyst for the regeneration of northern neighbourhoods in terms of returnees and commerce.