

Tel Afar, 21 August

On August 20 The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) began the operation to retake Tel Afar from IS, attacking the villages around the city. As of the morning of 22 August there has been limited IDP displacement via any axis. Given the lack of displacement, and reports from ISF members, it appears that most of the outlying villages around Tel Afar city are already empty of civilians.

On 21 August Rise conducted an assessment of the mustering point and a nearby Trauma Stabilisation Point (TSP) to the south of Tel Afar city. Coordinates of these sites as well as GPS route files can be provided by Rise bilaterally.

The civilian population inside the city itself remains an unknown. Many of the people to displace from from Tel Afar's surrounding villages so far have only have only spoken Turkmen. This was especially the case with women and children. However, it was suggested by an ISF member on 21 August that residents in the city will be more likely to also speak Arabic.



Access

The journey to Tel Afar took nearly five hours from Erbil. The trip could be completed in less time as checkpoint delays are variable. To get to the mustering point, Rise took the Sahaji Road out of Mosul. In Tel Zalat the road turns south west towards Tel Abta and from there, north to Tel Afar. It is approximately 110 kilometres from the edge of west Mosul to the mustering point. The road is mostly in very good condition, with occasional trenches. The final 24 kilometres of road near the mustering point are in extremely poor condition however, greatly slowing travel. It took nearly two hours to reach the TSP from west Mosul.

There are various checkpoints along the route, mostly at either end of it. Nearer Mosul there are several ISF and Shia PMF checkpoints. Tel Abta has a strong PMF presence and another Shia PMF has established a checkpoint near the mustering point. None of the checkpoints presented any access restrictions to conduct the assessment.

During the return journey, a different route was taken. It runs 32 kilometres directly east to west from a road near the mustering point, towards the road heading south from Tel Zalat. The distance is much shorter than the southern route but the road is mostly dirt and rock, slowing the journey. Accordingly, the journey time back to Mosul was only marginally quicker. Other actors have claimed that it can take an hour off the overall journey time with an off road vehicle though. The road currently runs within a few kilometres from the frontline though this could change soon, depending on military advances. Despite this, it is reportedly secure and the road itself is cleared of IEDs and UXO. This route also consumed much more fuel than the southern route, due to the poor state of the road.

Displacement

As of the morning of 22 August, only a few dozen IDPs have displaced south out of Tel Afar's surrounding villages. Similar numbers have been reported through the Musaid and Bwer mustering points. The military advances had retaken some outlying villages on the edge of the city but according to some ISF members these had been almost empty of civilians. Currently it is expected that any civilians displaced to the south of Tel Afar will be transported by the military to the Tel Abta road and taken down to the mustering point near Tel Majan.

Tel Majan Muster Point

The mustering point is situated on a junction along the road from Tel Abta to Tel Afar, approximately 10 Km south of the city. Currently it has shading provided by the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD) with 20 tents. ISF are present at the site and were prepared to hand out MoMD food and water. No NGO presence was observed at the site, but an NGO has reportedly provided food and water to IDPs since Rise's assessment. There are currently no latrines, though an NGO is reportedly planning on installing some. Given the lack of displacement they did not know whether their supplies would be adequate.

Given the mustering point's distance from the city, it is highly likely that it will be moved north when military advances allow.

Military Intelligence are expected to conduct screening through informants at the site and it was suggested that people may be waiting for one to three hours there, depending on levels of displacement. One ISF officer reported that IDPs will then be bused to Tel Abta for screening by the National Security Service (NSS). It is currently uncertain if or how this screening in Tel Abta will be conducted and if a humanitarian response will be needed in the town as well.

One ISF member suggested that the PMF will be handing out food and water to IDPs in areas nearer the frontline. It is currently unclear how this will be conducted or if it will affect displacement towards mustering points.

Medical Preparations

A team of international medics have helped establish an ISF TSP a few kilometres north of the mustering point. The TSP will be treating civilian and military casualties. The PMF have a hospital south of the mustering point where casualties will be taken. One of the international medics claimed it was very well equipped. The TSP has seven ambulances available to take casualties to the hospital. The TSP currently lacks adequate shading. However, they have yet to receive many casualties and are expecting to be able to move into a structure closer to the city soon.